LUCASARTS *unveils* Rebellion, Jedi Knight *and* Monkey Island 3!

IM1A2 ABRAMS TIPS!

The Ultimate Gaming Magazine August/September 1997

COMPUTER GAME™ ENTERTAINMENT

STARCRAFT

Blizzard Charts the Final Frontier

Over 45 In-Depth Reviews & Previews

Pax Imperia 2 ■ Lands of Lore 2 ■ Blood Omen ■ Defiance

Red Jack's Revenge ■ Fragile Allegiance

Forgotten Realms ■ Theme Hospital

X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter ■ Versailles

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Pacific General

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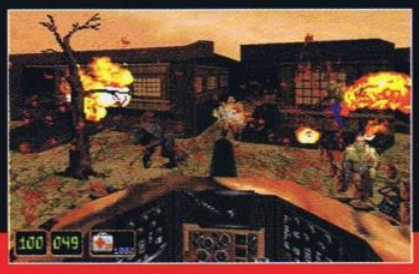

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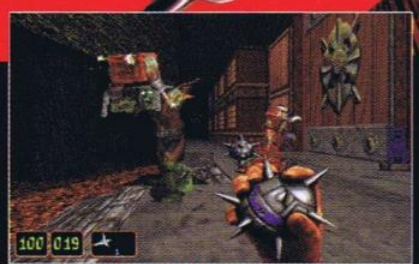

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GT Interactive Software

www.gtinteractive.com

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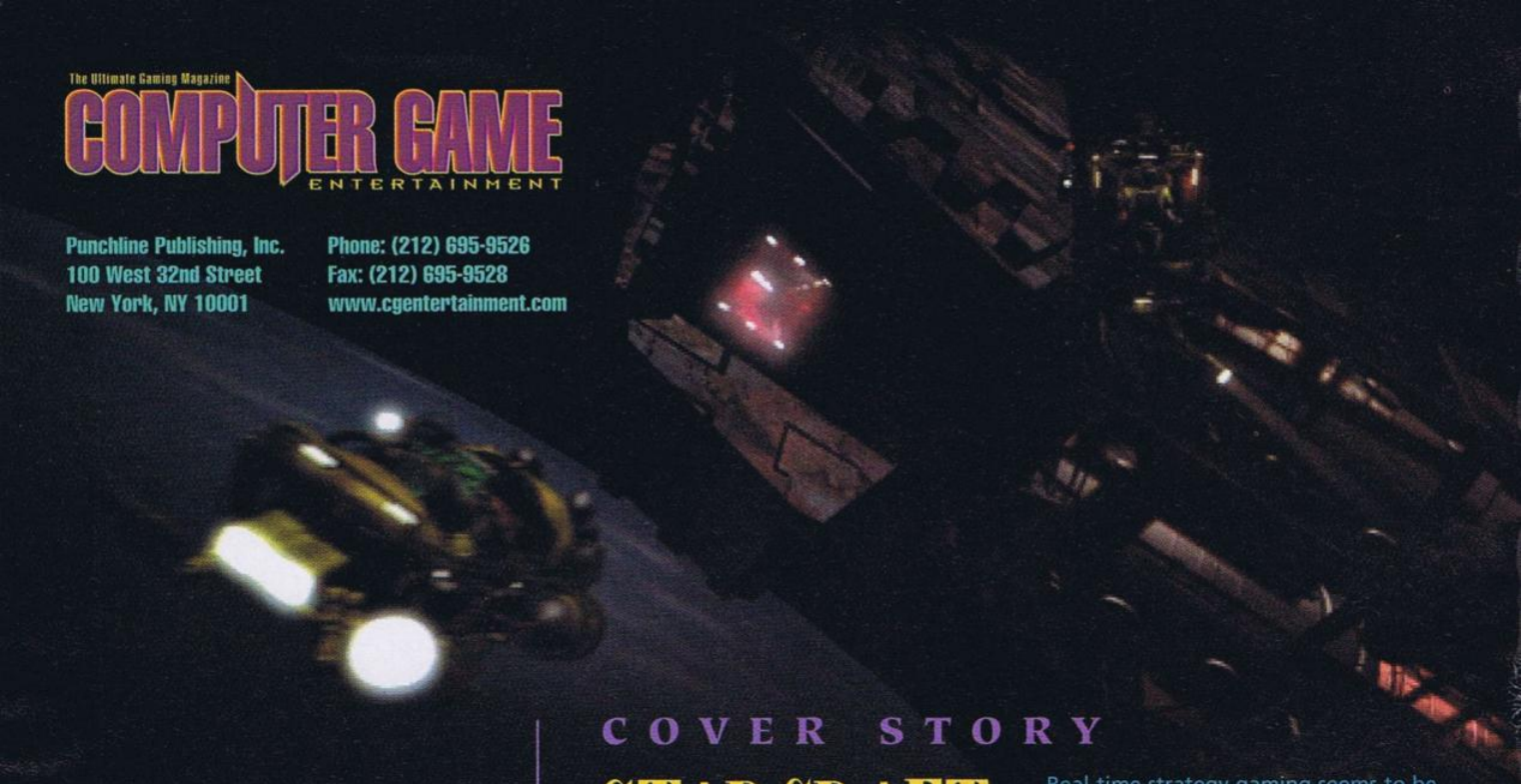
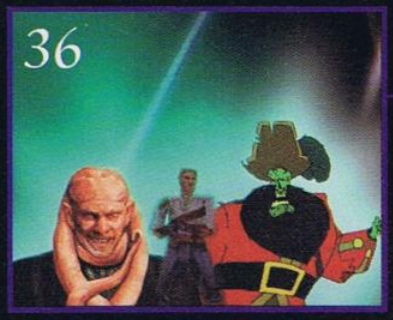


COVER STORY

STARCRAFT

Real-time strategy gaming seems to be the rage these days, centering on everything from plastic toys to the proverbial toys of war. Who better then than the award-winning Blizzard Entertainment to grope with the unimaginable terrors of deep space as they set off to explore the infinite unknown. 19

FEATURES



It is a Time of Rebellion

LucasArts has long been regarded as one of the most versatile and creative game publishers this side of Endor. As you'll soon discover, they're seeking to retain their impeccable stature courtesy of a trio of eagerly awaited new releases.

Pacific General

The fifth and final installment of SSI's Five-Star Series of wargames is fast approaching completion. Find out why the critically acclaimed series looks to go out with a bang instead of a whimper.

Pax Imperia: Eminent Domain

It's been said that "in space no one can hear you scream." Well, judging by what we've discerned, the upcoming *Pax Imperia: Eminent Domain* may cause a few gamers to scream with delight.

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PRESENTS...

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Giant 3D environments, including extra large maps for 32 meg users.

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3D tanks move smoothly over the hill as they move into position.

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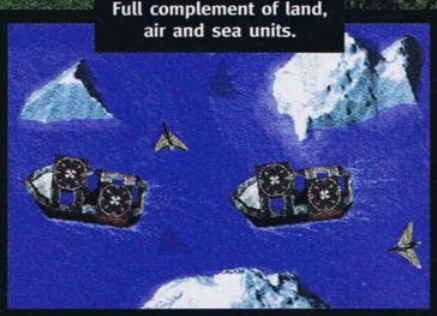
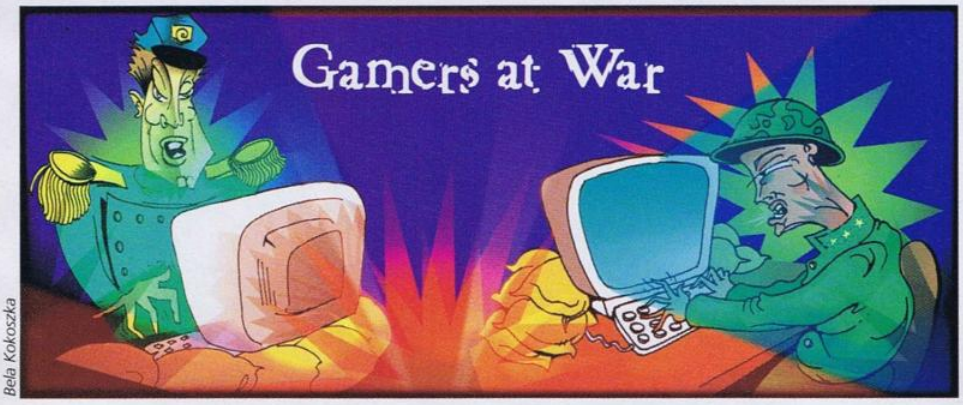


Full complement of land, air and sea units.

Extensive multi-player support including 'Watch and Join modes'.

"Who's On First?"

We live in very competitive times. Take the automobile industry, for instance. For the last 25 years or so, since the Middle East oil embargo of the mid-70s, domestic automobile manufacturers have been continually peering over their shoulders, attempting to evaluate what the European and Japanese car manufacturers have up their sleeve. Detroit has been overtaken by smaller, more fuel-efficient cars, streamlined designs, better braking and steering systems, side impact panels, airbags, etc., etc. It seems like the domestic automobile manufacturers have been playing catch-up with their more ingenious neighbors for quite some time.



Bela Kokoszka

The home electronics industry fares little better. Every year, consumers have been bombarded with an ever-wider array of smaller palmcorders, sleeker VCRs and larger television sets. Where we're supposed to put that humongous 70" projection-screen TV with doppler-shifting surround sound speakers never seems to enter into the marketing equation. I guess they're supposed to occupy the space vacated by the more diminutive palmcorders....

Of course, the biggest culprit of this corporate infighting happens to be the computer hardware manufacturers and software publishers. As we've all discovered, home computing is something of a mixed blessing, many times proving to be both a godsend and a curse. Sure, we're all happily typing away at the speed of sound, churning out our never-to-published manuscripts, ill-conceived diaries and grocery lists seconds after we boot up. However, hardware seems antiquated the moment we take it home, and most software becomes outdated the second we rip off the shrinkwrap. Every month, new products are brought to market claiming to make our lives, and the lives of our loved ones, fuller, richer and more well-rounded with the click of a keystroke. Gimme a break! The fact is, supply has outstripped demand several times over — until something genuinely radical and awe-inspiring comes along, I'll continue to window shop, thank you very much.

Then there's the gaming magazines. For some inexplicable reason, computer gaming magazines have long felt obligated to scoop their competitors, placing undue emphasis on releasing information in the quickest (and often least effective) manner. I've read countless supposed "feature stories" or preview articles that read like rewritten press releases, never once mentioning if the writer actually saw, much less played, the game in question. Game reviews share much the same fate — frequently, they're based upon unfinished code, demos or, in extreme cases, unavailable software.

I'm not sure I'll ever fully comprehend the mechanism at work here. Suffice it to say that many magazines rush to pass judgment on every new game well ahead of the competition. Never mind that this policy carries with it some grave implications. First of all, imposing curtailed deadlines on the writer means that he or she has precious little time to properly evaluate the software. I've heard countless horror stories where the reviewer was asked to turn in their article within 48 hours of having received the game. Never mind that it sometimes can take a couple of weeks to play a game all the way through.

We've rapidly grown accustomed, if not comfortable, with instantaneous communication, whether it be the nightly news, the morning paper or up-to-the-minute information retrieval services. While processing and disseminating information in a prompt manner is indeed commendable, the fact is that the policy of reviewing software at the drop of the hat has gotten out of hand. Game magazines are supposed to provide a service to their readers, playing and evaluating software to determine if the reader would be wise to purchase or steer clear of the product in question. Whether we like to admit it or not, evaluating games takes more time than a movie, restaurant and, in some cases, even a book review. If we continually demand that the game reviewer remain focused more on deadlines than properly appraising software, then perhaps we'll all be in for a rude awakening one day.

FAMILY MATTERS

This month, *Computer Game Entertainment* debuts several new departments and features. For starters, Senior Editor Tim Liebe uncorks his long-awaited "Under the Hood" column. As you'll soon discover, Tim capably clues us into the latest — and sometimes not-so-greatest — hardware destined to hit the streets. On a month-by-month basis, Tim will be addressing everything from the newest joysticks to DVD-ROM technology and beyond. Bringing a wealth of experience with him, we know you join us in welcoming him into the folds of *CGE*.

This month's feature stories are on *Starcraft*, Blizzard's breathtaking real-time strategy game set in outer space; *Pacific General*, SSI's final installment in their critically acclaimed Five Star wargame series; and *Lands of Lore: The Guardians of Destiny*, Westwood's long-awaited sequel to smash hit of several years ago. So sit back, put your feet up and figure out what you want to turn to first!

Marc Dultz, Editor-in-Chief

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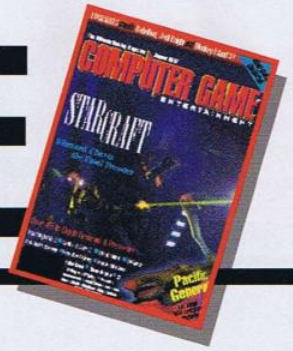
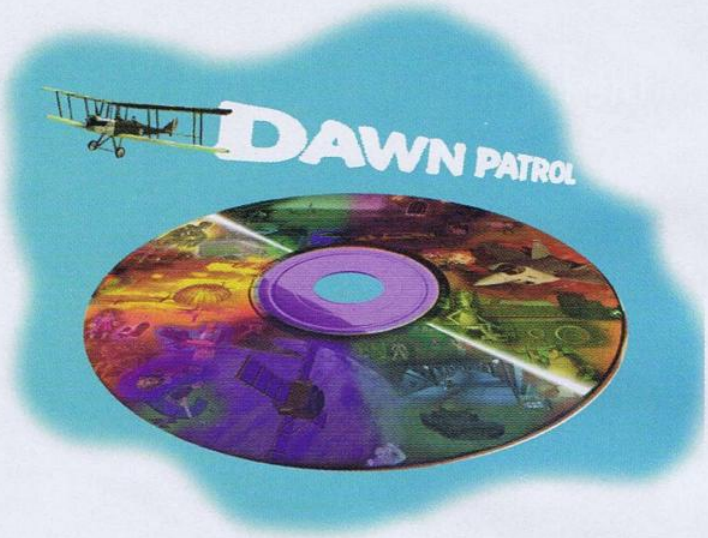


WELCOME to *Computer Game Entertainment*'s second monthly CD-ROM. Last month, we included a full game along the usual assortment of demos, and it proved to be so popular that we're doing it again.

This time out, our full-version game is Empire Interactive's *Dawn Patrol*. Have you ever dreamed, like Snoopy, of being a World War I flying ace? In this classic action game, you can fulfill that dream — and you won't have to sit on top of your doghouse to do it!

What would you pay for all this? Wait, there's more! We've also packed the disc full of playable demos. To round things out, there's upgrades and patches for several of your favorite games. Best of all, you get everything FREE, with your purchase of this issue!



GETTING ROLLING WITH WINDOWS 95

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS FOR MENU

- 60 MHz Pentium
- 8 megabytes of RAM
- 16-bit sound card
- 4 megabytes hard disk space
- VGA card

GETTING TO THE MAIN MENU

- Insert the disc in your CD-ROM drive.
- Wait for Autoplay to engage. If it doesn't after a couple minutes, pull up Run from your Start menu, type "<CD-ROM drive>:\cge95.exe", and click on *OK* to enter.

NAVIGATION

- At the first screen, you'll see our disclaimer. Read it, and if you agree to its terms, click on the *I Agree* button to get to the main menu.
- At the main menu, you'll see a brief description of this month's game, *Dawn Patrol*. If you want to load it, click on the *Complete Game* tab at the top of the menu interface. If you'd rather get to the demos or upgrades/patches, click on *Demos* instead. (Of course, if you *really* want to make us happy, click on the *Subscription* tab and subscribe to *CGE* today!)
- At each of the submenu screens, click on the appropriate button to install whichever game, demo, upgrade or patch you want.

ROLLING WITH WINDOWS 3.x

Sorry, but our menuing system only works under Windows 95. If you've got Windows 3.x, or if for some reason our menu and your Win 95 computer don't get along, you can manually install the games, demos and upgrades/patches by following these simple steps:

- In the File Menu, type in the letter of your CD-ROM drive. Go to the folder you want, double-click to open it, then look the *Readme* file. Double-click on it to open, and read what it tells you to do.
- At the Program Manager, pull down Run from the File menu. Type in the letter of your CD-ROM drive, then click on the *Browse* button. Find the appropriate folder, double click to open, then double-click on the installation file (usually *setup.exe* or *install.exe*).
- Click on *OK* to start installing the game!

If you experience insurmountable difficulties with our CD-ROM or menu system, you may request help by e-mailing us at mail@cgentertainment.com. If you experience difficulties with the games or demos themselves, please check the publisher's Website for help.

NOTE: Many of the demos on our CD-ROM are Windows 95-only, and some may be MMX-optimized. MS-DOS games may also experience memory or other problems when running on a Windows 95 system. Please read their *readme* flies thoroughly to make certain your computer is compatible with the game before requesting assistance.

DISCLAIMER

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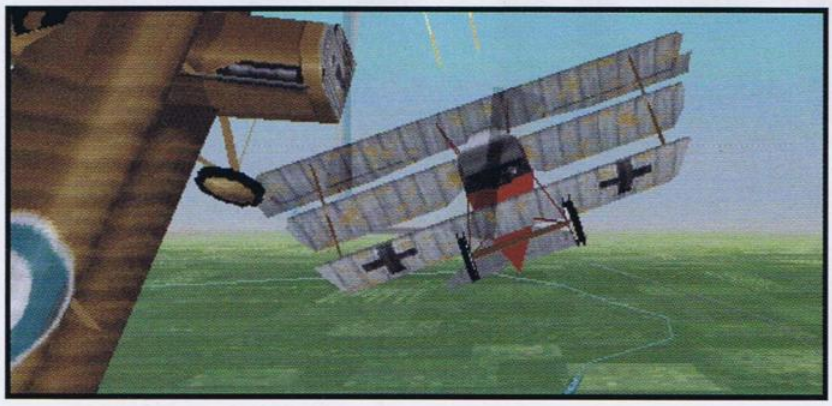
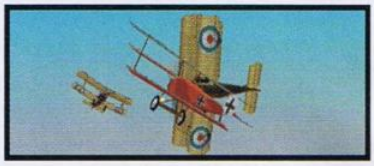


DAWN PATROL



OUR FEATURE GAME THIS MONTH, *Dawn Patrol*, transports you back to the unfriendly skies over WWI Europe. You'll fly one of 13 period aircraft, including Sopwith Camels, Fokker Triplanes and SPAD 7s, in over 150 missions. You'll dogfight against pioneer air aces like Germany's "Red Baron" von Richthofen, America's Eddie Rickenbacker and England's Major McCudden. With interior cockpit and multiple external plane viewing perspectives in 640 x 480 SVGA mode, you'll experience the joys — and terrors — of early air combat. The game includes full mission briefings, embedded hypertext, 64 pages of pilot biographies, and realistic sound effects and period ditties for added authenticity.

System requirements for this game are a 386/25 IBM or compatible computer with 555K available conventional and 2.2 megs free expanded memory, VGA card, DOS 5.0 or higher, 500K hard disk space and a dual-speed CD-ROM. For best results, though, a 486/66 DX IBM compatible with 570K available conventional and 3 megs free expanded memory, 1 megabyte VESA or PCI SVGA card, a quad-speed CD-ROM, a Sound Blaster-compatible audio card, and a mouse or joystick are *strongly* recommended.

This DOS game has been successfully tested on Windows 95 machines; however, we've included a Win 95 patch in our Patches & Upgrades directory to improve performance. If you have problems running the game on your Win 95 system after using the patch, attempt first to create a boot disk (see game setup for more information). If that fails, check out Empire Interactive's Website at www.empire.com.

DEMOS

- **REBEL MOON RISING** — *GT Interactive, www.gtinteractive.com*
- **SHADOW WARRIOR** — *GT Interactive*
- **SAFE CRACKER** — *GT Interactive*
- **OUTPOST 2** — *Sierra On-Line, www.sierra.com*
- **BETRAYAL IN ANTARRA** — *Sierra On-Line*
- **BATTLEGROUND: BULL RUN** — *TalonSoft, www.talonsoft.com*
- **NAPOLEON IN RUSSIA** — *TalonSoft*
- **NEED FOR SPEED II** — *Electronic Arts, www.ea.com*
- **ARDENNES OFFENSIVE** — *SSI, www.ssionline.com*
- **EXTREME ASSAULT** — *Blue Byte Software, www.bluebyte.com*

PATCHES/ UPGRADES

- Windows 95 patch for *Dawn Patrol*
- *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*
- *Age of Sail*
- *Battleground: Ardennes*
- *Battleground: Bulge*
- *Battleground: Gettysburg*
- *Battleground: Antietam*
- *Battleground: Shiloh*
- *Battleground: Waterloo*

NEWS

CGE

Gaming Large

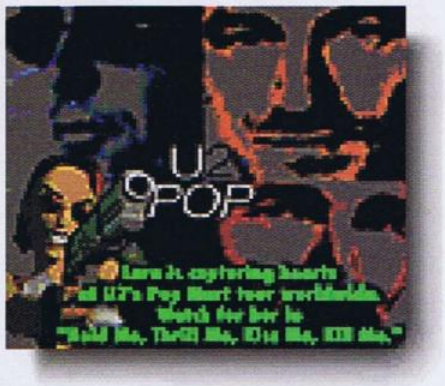
YOU LIKE TO IMMERSE YOURSELF in PC gameplay. That's why you purchased a superfast Pentium with a 14x CD-ROM drive, and a 3D video accelerator card. It's too bad you're stuck with a dinky 15" or 17" VGA monitor, though. Wouldn't it be nice if, instead, you could hook the game up to your television set like people with Playstations and Saturns can? Now you can, thanks to new TV monitors with VGA inputs from both Hitachi and Panasonic.

Television monitors with VGA capability aren't new — Sony, for one, has been making them for years. However, having been designed for commercial rather than home use, they're relatively expensive and lack consumer features like built-in tuners. Both the Hitachi MMV and the Panasonic CT-36VG50, on the other hand, are full-featured home theater televisions with tuners and stereo speakers, digital comb filters for cleaner NTSC (America's broadcast video standard) color, and both RF as well as S-Video and composite A/V inputs for improved overall picture quality.

Weighing in, diagonally, at 27 inches, the MMV offers 600 lines of NTSC horizontal picture resolution, and 640 x 480 pixel standard VGA resolution through an input in the back. In VGA mode, the monitor offers refresh rates of 60 - 70 Hz with a dot pitch of .81 mm. There's also a universal remote which doubles as a wireless cursor control, provided you've hooked the MMV's PS2 mouse output into your PC's mouse input. The MMV shipped in June with a suggested list price of $799.95.

Available this September, the CT-36VG50 is a 36-inch monitor with 800 lines of NTSC horizontal resolution and 800 x 600 pixel SVGA resolution. It's also capable of accepting MAC2 and 8514A digital TV signals. It offers both front and rear VGA inputs, along with two sets of S-Video and composite A/V inputs. Other features include locking of the front control settings (so children can't change them) and Auto Power On, so users can power up the set from a their computer's power strip. There is no suggested list price available as of this writing.

You can visit either Hitachi's Website at www.hitachi.com, or Panasonic's at www.panasonic.com.



U2 Sees Double

EIDOS INTERACTIVE'S HOTTEST NEW STAR Laura Croft has taken to the rock concert circuit with mega-group U2's 14-month PopMart tour. It seems that front man Bono is a fan: he approached Eidos about adapting *Tomb Raider's* well endowed, mega-heroine to appear on the world's largest — 7,000 square feet — video screen. Now archaeology's most daring action star (described by one reviewer as having "enough attitude to send Indy Jones running for his mamma") hurtles through the group's nightly performances. Her mission: to rescue Bono from extreme peril and carry him off with her.

It's an amazing union of rock and gaming, one that's sure to draw new rocker fans to Eidos's bestselling *Tomb Raider* — oh yes, and new gamer fans to U2. Rock on!

Shop till You're Dropped

ARE YOU ONE OF THOSE ORGANIZED PEOPLE who like to do their holiday shopping early? Acclaim must appreciate such early birds, because they're offering a PC lineup for 1998 that will tempt even the most tightly clutched bills from your pockets. Keep an eye open for these hot new offerings several seasons down the pike:

NHL Breakaway Hockey '98: The player has control of the game, with customizing available for teams, drafts and trades. 3D graphics and motion-capture technology blend to make the images as real-looking as possible. Speed and impacts are calculated using motion, height and weight to make the game follow actual play as closely as possible.

NFL Quarterback Club '98: This game is an official NFL license with the look and sound of a real game (including play-by-play color commentary by a network sportscaster). Would-be coaches and managers can build teams with trades, drafts and recruiting, cap salaries and script plays against the offensive team.

Bust-A-Move 2 for PC: This is sheer entertainment with lots of bubbles. Match the color bubbles from your gun with the color bubbles over an opponent's head and fire: they'll pop, to mess up an opponent's screen. Does everything have to be deadly serious?

For more on these and Acclaim's other products, pop on over to their Website at www.acclaimnation.com.

Shake, Rattle 'n Roll

BIG THINGS HAPPENED AT THE E3 trade show, and Bethesda Softworks — creators of the highly praised *Daggerfall* and *Terminator: Future Shock*, not to mention *Skycar* and *Arena* — was among the newsmakers. They introduced four big titles at the show, which should be available later this year:

X-Car: Experimental Racing represents their hot new racing sim for the PC platform. 3D texture-mapped environments and super VGA with resolutions up to 640x480 are but the first ingredients in a winning racing sim. *X-Car* also comes equipped with a selection of hi-tech racing cars, a plethora of fully customizable components and an array of life-like tracks and conditions which allow the user to fine-tune his or her car before racing either against the computer or other players via modem or LAN. (The *X-Car* release date was moved to August 1997 to allow for the addition of European-based tracks and for other goodies, as announced at E3.)

New games in their *Elder Scrolls* series were also shown. *Battlespire*, an RPG for PC platform, is a side story in *Elder Scrolls*. Features include high res and high color, as well as multi-player capability — release date is August 1997. *TES: Redguard* is an action-adventure PC game with 3D graphics, slated for release in November 1997.

10th Planet, Bethesda's "massive" space combat game for PC, also made an appearance at E3. As Bethesda's John Lee put it, "If you've seen the game before, you know how good it looks."Contact Bethesda at http://bethsoft.com.

F-22 Wars: When the Bough Breaks

INTERACTIVE MAGIC INFORMS US that their flap with Lockheed Martin over who owns the trademark rights to the name "F-22" has worked out in their favor. Lockheed formally announced in mid-June that they would not "license trademarks and logos associated with the F-22 fighter without consultation with the US Air Force, and no licenses will be granted on an exclusive basis."

This whole brouhaha began back in May, when I-Magic received a pair of "cease and desist" letters on their *iF-22* flight sim. One, sent by rival game developer NovaLogic, could take a couple of years to settle. NovaLogic contends that they had filed for a trademark on the name first — but I-Magic counters that they had sold early versions of their *iF-22* game before NovaLogic, which they say gives them a stronger trademark claim.

Lockheed's cease and desist letter, though, really got I-Magic steamed. The defense contractor stated that *they* owned the trademark to the F-22 Raptor, and were negotiating a contract with NovaLogic for exclusive game use of the name and other F-22 non-classified materials (i.e., likenesses and photographs). I-Magic responded that no defense contractor has a right to sell exclusive licenses to any publicly-available information regarding taxpayer-funded aircraft, vehicles and military equipment. The game publisher also stated that negotiating exclusive game licenses with defense contractors would stifle competition and start bidding wars that would ultimately hurt the whole industry.

The Air Force took I-Magic's side against Lockheed, stating that the name "F-22", the name "Raptor" when used in conjunction with "F-22", and all photographs of the F-22 Raptor are in the public domain. The Interactive Digital Software Association also agreed with I-Magic, having sent a letter of support to company Chairman "Will Bill" Stealey.

To read about this controversy from I-Magic's viewpoint, including the Air Force's position on the matter, visit the "F-22 Debate Page" on their Website at www.imagicgames.com. If you'd like NovaLogic's side of the story, check out their Website at www.novalogic.com. If you'd like to submit your opinion to us, send e-mail to mail@cgentertainment.com, Subject: F-22 Debate.

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Ignite Takes No Prisoners

IGNITE, INC., formerly Graphix Zone/Inscape, has a killer lineup of PC games for the current year, one guaranteed to keep gamers playing for months to come.

Receiving beaucoup attention in the music industry as well as the gaming world, Peter Gabriel's CD-ROM *Eve*, released in May, is one of the more unusual games on the market. Gabriel — a major rock star since the early Eighties — worked on the game's music as well as served as the basis for the central "Adam" character. After Adam and Eve separate in Eden, players guide Adam in a quest to gather elements from Pandora's box which have been scattered across four worlds. (These worlds are based on previously-unreleased versions of Gabriel's songs.) With musical samples collected en route, players can record both music and interactive videos of their own.

Princess Maker 2, released in July, is something else again — a simulation game done in the style of Japanese anime. As a reward for saving the kingdom, The player is presented with a young daughter. The player must raise the child into a Princess who, then, eventually marries a heroic Prince. Outcomes and choices vary as the player, using various methods, tries to give her/his daughter an education, exposure to culture, self-defense lessons and other things she will need to be a proper Princess. Parents beware: if their daughter falls into a less elegant life, she will never be a Princess. No pressure here!

A sequel to the *Faery Tale Adventure* game, *Halls of the Dead: Faery Tale Adventure II* for CD-ROM is a fantasy role-playing game which gives over 60 hours of gameplay. It's set in a medieval war, caught in the battle between Order and Chaos, where three heroic brothers fight all manner of mad, bad, dark things with brains, weapons and, of course, magic. The environments are 3D, as are the characters; the game is scheduled for release in August.

Race-car fans take notice: Ignite's *MagZone* is a real-time 3D racing game based on high-tech mag-lev vehicles. Players have a choice of vehicles, not to mention a 3D range of motion, more than 12 racing zones, a selection of non-lethal weapons that are unique to each vehicle and over 40 attributes of motion calculated according to the physics of motion, force and mass. This CD-ROM game, scheduled for October release, lets players race either against four or more other players, or against the AI.

To the winner go the spoils: the victor in *HyperWar* achieves world domination by population management, military strength, international diplomacy and fraud. The players' approach also must shift with changing times as the game's timeframe moves from the years following WWII to 2010. Advising in the design of this CD-ROM — scheduled for October release — is Colonel (ret.) John Warden, whose real-life credits include the architecture of the high-tech American air campaign in Desert Storm. Need we say more?

Red Shift, coming in October, is a real-time strategy game for CD-ROM, set in a post-apocalyptic world. Players must chose a society (militaristic, scientific or environmentalist), and develop its troops working on both the strengths and weaknesses of their societies. All this brings players to the point where the three societies meet in a final battle. Only by wiping out rival opponents will the player learn who, or what, caused the apocalypse.

Want to know more? Check out Ignite's Website at http://inscape.com.

Gone Fishing

SIERRA ON-LINE has added a new entertainment CD-ROM for PC to its *Front Page Sports* line. *Trophy Rivers* is a fishing sim for those who want to try their luck cyber-fishing in the five best trout, salmon and steelhead rivers in North America. This isn't a just-get-your-feet-wet sim, but a totally rounded exploration of the sport with a vast array of player options.

Even the fishing sites are varied: the Miramichi River in New Brunswick, Canada, Arkansas' White River, Oregon's Deschutes, Washington's Sol Duc River and the Big Hole River in Montana. Players can cyber-explore the location by walking the riverbank, wading or drifting in a boat or canoe. They'll encounter rock beds and rapids, learn how to spot the best locations and select from over two hundred lures and flies (as well as from videos featuring tips on their use). If salmon, trout and steelhead aren't to the player's liking, they may select a different fish from twelve more species.

The competition-minded player is offered not only one-on-one competitions, but tournaments as well. They may also compete with human opponents via modem, network or Internet. This interactive software, calculated to supply the needs of the most demanding cyber-angler, is priced at $54.95. Look for an October release date, and don't forget to bring your lu cky hat.

Plug-in 'n Play

IT'S THOSE FOLKS AT SIERRA, pulling yet another cyber-rabbit from their corporate hat. This time it's on-line gaming in the shape of *The Realm*, a multiplayer adventure game/club/BBS. Players obtain membership with a $49.95 yearly fee, which gives them access to their fellow players on-line. The developers point out that gaming against live humans — possibly different ones every time the player logs on to the service — means play is always changing and always new. Word of mouth has already brought in more than five thousand subscribers worldwide.

The Realm itself is a role-playing game, set in a medieval fantasy world and illustrated with color graphics and real-time animation. Players can choose to fight, explore or undertake a quest, interacting with other players, beasts and monsters. Just remember, another player is a real person with whom it's as easy to chat as it is to fight or quest. There's no telling whom you will meet or what may develop.

This interactive software has been over two years in development by designer Stephen Nichols and his team. To make it work, Sierra invested in new servers, anticipating rapid growth for the service. For the gamer to make *The Realm* work, s/he will need at least a 486/66 processor, 14.4 or better modem, an SVGA graphic card and monitor, 8 megs of RAM and a CD-ROM drive. While the software won't be available at the retail level, it can be purchased at the Sierra Website, www.sierra.com. A free demo version can be downloaded from www.realmserver.com.

Home Improvement

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT: Sierra On-Line announces the release of a powerful new home productivity package, *SierraHome 97*. Containing five different programs — *Collier's Encyclopedia*, *CustomHome 3D*, *LandDesigner 3D*, *MasterCook Deluxe 4.0*, and *Print Artist 4.0* — the package has something for everyone. This includes the price-conscious shopper; the individual softwares would cost over two hundred dollars if sold separately, but *SierraHome 97* carries an estimated retail price of just $74.95.

Need to design or redesign your landscape? *LandDesigner 3D* comes with a 3D walkthrough that allows users to see what their new garden will look like before they tear up their old one; this includes a "grow" feature to show what their landscape will look like on a seasonal basis or as the years go by. Users can design their landscapes with one of thirty templates, as well as with drawing and editing tools to help them plan gardens to their exact tastes. Other features, like a plant encyclopedia, gardening tips and full-color photos, make this product a good reference tool as well as a garden planner.

CustomHome 3D is like *LandDesigner 3D*, except it's for the home. 3D graphics make it easy to design a new home plan from scratch or from the 250 built-in plans; A 3D walkthrough enables users to inspect the new design on screen. Software "wizards" are built-in to assist the user step-by-step.

MasterCook Deluxe 4.0 enables the user to get maximum use from their newly designed kitchen or even from the old one, with over 2,000 recipes ranging from basic to gourmet. A recipe management system makes it possible to add recipes — the user's own or Internet imports — work out the amount of fats, calories and vitamins and even rework recipes to feed different numbers of people. There are even video clips to teach food preparation.

Print Artist 4.0 is calculated to meet the needs of everyone from kids needing to put up flyers to recover that missing turtle to the budding desktop publisher. The product includes over 10,000 graphics, 400 different typestyles and 2,400 professional layouts, enabling the user to create signs, banners, labels, certificates — even gift boxes and mobiles. Effects, like zooms and custom colors, add to this product's versatility.

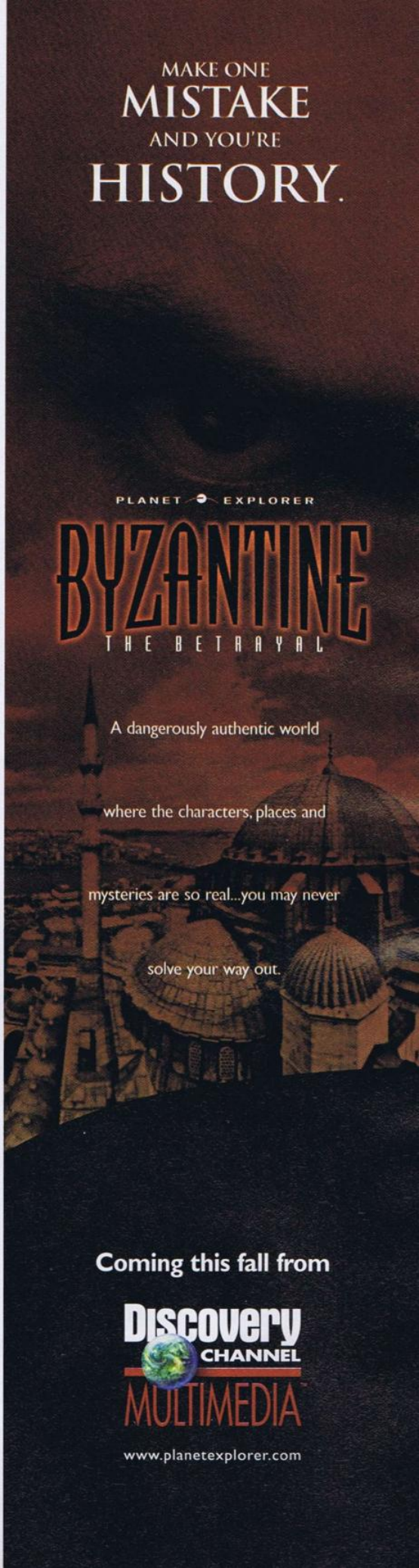
The icing on the *SierraHome 97* cake is the *Collier's Encyclopedia*, a 21-million word publication ideal for any home reference shelf. This unabridged text-only encyclopedia includes 23,000 in-depth articles covering a broad range of topics, plus over 400,000 links.

Because (Monitor) Size Matters

WERE YOU ONE OF THOSE CONSUMERS who bought a 15" monitor between May 1, 1991 and May 1, 1995, only to find that "15 inches" measured more like a hair less than 14 inches? Then justice — or at least a rebate — may be yours. The California Superior Court in San Francisco County is considering a proposed settlement of a class action suit brought against 31 manufacturers and/or distributors of 15" monitors.

The list of defendants covered by this proposed settlement reads like the Who's Who of the consumer electronics and computer industry: it includes Acer, Apple, AST, Compaq, Daewoo, Digital Equipment Corporation, Gateway 2000, Goldstar, IBM, Magnavox, Micron, Mitsubishi, NEC, Packard Bell, Panasonic, Radio Shack, Radius, Samsung, Sony, Tatung, Toshiba and Wyse. Though all these companies continue to deny that they misled anyone or did anything wrong, they've agreed to settle because "The Settling Companies have weighed the risks and potential costs of continued litigation of the Actions against the benefits of the proposed settlement" (quoted from the proposed settlement agreement).

If this settlement goes through, you can apply for a rebate — $13 against the purchase of a new monitor bought after September 7, 1997 but before September 7, 2000, or $6 cash. Wronged consumers can get further information (such as the rebate application form) and updates at the www.computermonitorcases.com Website.



Stocking Stuffers

FOR GAMERS WITH KIDS to shop for, it's never too early to think about Christmas. Humongous Entertainment, award-winning creators of several kids' games (*Putt-Putt*, *Freddi Fish*, *Pajama Sam*), will come to the embattled giver's rescue this year with a tempting mix of hybrid CD-ROMs for Windows 95, Windows 3.1 and Macintosh. These games offer entertainment, problem-solving and enough weird characters to hold even the most fidgety kid's interest.

Backyard Baseball: This is the first installation in the forthcoming Junior Sports series of games for kids ages 5-10, which include *Backyard Baseball*, *Backyard Basketball* and *Backyard Soccer*. *Baseball* allows the gamer to choose players, team names, uniforms and even logos. It comes with varying levels of difficulty and a choice of four playing fields, play-by-play announcers and a world championship game. As a bonus, kids can print photos and baseball cards, complete with statistics. *Baseball*, with a price tag of $39.95, will be in stores in October; look for *Backyard Basketball* and *Backyard Soccer* in 1998.

SPY Fox: Here's a game aimed at kids ages 5-10 from Humongous' Junior Adventure series. As SPY Fox the player — helped by partner Monkey Penny, SPY Corp.'s gadgets, kids and informants — tracks down the secret to the world's missing cows. Players must overcome obstacles to catch the bad guy and recover the missing cows, saving the world's milkshake supply. Look for this $39.95 hybrid CD-ROM in stores in October.

Kindergarten Big Thinkers and *First Grade Big Thinkers*: These are edutainment softwares, the first two releases in the Big Thinkers series, based on national curriculum standards. Kids interact with the twin stars, who can morph into various forms as they work through math, language, science, creative arts and thinking problems. An element of competition enters into problems as kids receive SmartStars on completing activities, to be saved toward the rank of SuperStar of Smart. Retailing separately at $29.95 each, *Kindergarten* and *First Grade Big Thinkers* will be soon followed by *Second Grade Big Thinkers*.

Pajama Sam's SockWorks, a multilevel game for kids (a sequel to *No Need to Hide When It's Dark Outside*), is available now. For more information on any Humongous offerings, try their Website at www.humongous .com.

News in Brief

MARK HAMILL returns as Col. Christopher Blair as Origin (designing for Electronic Arts) prepares *Wing Commander V*. This will be an interactive 3D action adventure in which the player, as Blair, battles Kilrathi bad guys to save the galaxy and improve the morale of fellow fighters.

DreamWorks Interactive announced *Trespasser*, an action/adventure title based on the universe of Michael Crichton's "Lost World," is slated for year-end release for Windows 95. Their *Dilbert's Desktop*, a ten-game compilation that parodies arcades, is slated for October appearance for both Windows 95 and Windows 3.1.

Players with PCs and Macs who want an early preview of Sega's online Heat.net (still in beta testing) can register and try out two downloadable war games, *Heat Wars* and *Scud*. Point your Web browser to www.heat.net (18 and older only, please).

The Total Entertainment Network (TEN) has announced four new online-only games: *Twilight Lands*, a beta-test RPG with real-time combat (Ice Online); *Confirmed Kill*, an Eidos Interactive flight sim, and two unnamed war sims. In a related item, Apogee Software, who licensed the popular *Duke Nukem* to TEN, has just signed on with exclusive licenses for three more games.

Evryware is offering an online game at their Web site, *Pyrosaurus*. A new PC strategy game, *Pyrosaurus* allows players to act as teams of dinosaurs that train as killers. It's turn-based, and players can duel other teams online.

At last Maxis' third SimCity, *SimCity 3000*, is here, employing first-person perspective 3D graphics and a revamped sim model. New mini-sims allow players to interact with SimCity's residents and view the city from street level to stratosphere. A Windows 95 version will be available for the holidays.

Diamond Multimedia Systems has announced new, reduced pricings for its pro graphics accelerators. The Fire GL 1000 is now priced at under $300, the Fire GL 3000 under $1700.

Psygnosis' *Destruction Derby 2* hops onto the Internet with a multiplayer PC version. The Multiplayer PC Upgrade, which is 600K before compression, adds a number of new features to the bang-'em-up racing game, including both LAN and Internet play for up to eight players. The upgrade can be downloaded direct from www.psygnosis.com, or from several of the most popular gaming Web sites.

CyberFlix's critically acclaimed interactive adventure *Titanic: Adventure Out of Time* will now be distributed by CUC Software, parent company of Sierra On-Line, Blizzard Entertainment and Knowledge Adventure. This follows on the heels of former distributor GTE Entertainment's announcement that it would discontinue operations.

Two of Blue Byte Software's upcoming titles are the futuristic 3D strategy game *Incubation: Time is Running Out*, scheduled for Fall '97, and another bloodsport title for the first quarter of '98, *Pro Tennis Tour '98*. (Just kidding!)

Duke Nukem just can't catch a break! While vacationing at *Penthouse*'s Paradise Island resort, those nasty aliens drop in and try enslaving the *Penthouse* Pets. This expansion level, endorsed by both *Duke Nukem* distributor GT Interactive and *Penthouse*, can be downloaded from www.gtinteractive.com.

Of Things to Come

T•HQ INC., CREATOR of the award-winning MAC game *Pax Imperia* and its successor, *Pax Imperia: Eminent Domain* (previewed elsewhere in this issue), has been known chiefly for its console games. Now T•HQ enters the PC market with a vengeance, issuing a varied collection of games to suit all tastes. 1998 in particular looks like their year to rumble:

Bass Masters Classic: Tournament Edition for CD-ROM is a Fall, '97 offering based on a famed bass fishing tournament. Players are given a choice of actual lakes where the competition is held, a selection of authentic equipment, varied difficulty settings and the chance to compete against some of America's top fishermen. Tips on lures and castings from fishing giant Roland Martin add to the allure of this $49.95 package.

Another tournament game, *Brunswick World Tournament of Champions* (PC version to be released in the second quarter of 1998) features bowling pros, tournament rules, equipment and lanes. Among other factors, players will be able to control the ball's spin, weight and speed. Like other T•HQ platform games, this PC package will carry a $49.95 pricetag.

Dead Unity (Due sometime in '98) is, you guessed it, a real-time, science fiction game. Players can revel in 3D graphics as they wheel 'n deal in an alternate reality.

Speed Tribes is for the Mad Max in all of us. In this CD-ROM title, players are plunged into a world where biology and mechanics are combined to produce the members of six Speed Tribes, some more machine than human. "Bikers of the air," their sole aim is survival at any cost. Players choose their tribe and train in their special, trap- and obstacle-loaded arenas. Definitely a survive-or-die experience — look for it in 1998.

Here is something guaranteed to scare: horrormeister Stephen King's *The Dark Half* is on T•HQ's 1998 PC schedule. For those who haven't read the book, here's the premise: writer Thad Beaumont created a pen name so he could write dark and scary books as George Stark. The only problem was, when Thad decided he didn't need George any more, George came to life to do the thing he did best: maim, terrorize and destroy. This translates to a two-pronged game in which the player can enter Thad's more ordered universe, or George's monstrous one. Decisions, decisions. . . .

What remains to be said? T•HQ is a company to watch, now and in 1998! Check out their Webpage at www.thq.com.

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The Wages of *Sin*

LET'S BE FRANK — porno movies have stronger storylines than most 3D shoot-'em-ups. What passes for "plot" in your average first-person action game can be summed up in one sentence, generally starting with "A lot of incredibly ugly aliens/demons invade a space station/abandoned city, killing everyone but the tough-as-nails hero...." Hipnotic Interactive is going to change all that with their upcoming Windows 95 action title, *Sin*, distributed by Activision.

"*Sin* adds a critical and often overlooked element to the first-person shooter genre — a plot that draws players in, and makes them feel they've got a big secret to uncover," states Bobby Kotick, Activision's Chairman and CEO. 3D action fans who care more about gameplay than story needn't worry, though — Hipnotic has licensed the *Quake* engine from id Software. "Be prepared to have the fist of reality shoved down your throat," promises Hipnotic's CEO Harry Miller.

The game is set in a bleak 21st Century where drugs, crime and corruption run rampant. In an effort to cope with these social ills, local governments have authorized the use of privatized "strike forces." As a strike force leader, you blast your way through six vast, complex game environments crawling with both human and mutant adversaries. In the midst of all the fighting, though, you discover that the crime epidemic you've been hired to deal with is more than random chaos — there appears to be a sinister controlling intelligence at work....

Players eager to *Sin* will have to wait until early 1998. For updates on this and other Hipnotic games, point your Web browser to www.hipnotic.com.

More News in Brief

WESTWOOD STUDIOS, publishers of the *Command and Conquer* and *Lands of Lore* series, presented an action/adventure game based on the cult movie *Blade Runner* at E3. Westwood also showed *Games People Play*, a suite of three card games for play on Westwood Chat, their online gaming service.

Quake designer John Romero has lost at his own game. Romero was beaten handily at The *Quake* Tournament, sponsored by Total Entertainment Network (TEN) and Intel at the recent Computer Game Developer's Conference, by Kornelia Takacs. She came from behind to win the Tournament, which pitted six finalists against each other for over $4,000 in prizes.

Strategic Simulations Inc. has agreed to distribute three GameTek games for the PC platform, including *Dark Colony*, *Dark Colony II* and *Robotech*. *Dark Colony*, a real-time strategy title in the *Command & Conquer* mode, will be available in time for the holidays. *DC II* and *Robotech* will come out sometime in 1998.

Edutainment publisher Gryphon Software has just released *The Superman Activity Center*. Based on the Time-Warner animated series, *SAC* includes several animations, along with some of the voice actors from the show. The PC/Mac CD-ROM has two modes of play: "Story mode," which follows the Man of Steel from his escape from Krypton as a baby to his start of his career as Superman; and "activity mode", where children can play 10 - 12 different activities at three difficulty levels. Suggested list price is $49.

The Fireons are coming! The Mayans are here! Koei's upcoming title *Sign of the Sun* is based on the ancient Mayan belief that there are five Ages of the Sun. The player, as hero James Mariner, is taken to the year 2012, when the Fifth Age ends. Mariner discovers that a race of gaseous beings, the Fireons, live inside our Sun and are bent on galactic destruction. Through a time gate, Mariner is transported back to the time of the Mayans, whom he enlists in his plan to stop the Fireons. *Sign of the Sun* will be available in early 1998 for Windows 95 CD-ROM.

It's a Wonderful *Half-Life*

HERE'S ANOTHER ONE FROM SIERRA ON-LINE! The interactive entertainment giant has just inked a deal with new software development company Valve to release their debut title, *Half-Life*, due out in November. Utilizing id Software's 3D *Quake* engine, along with proprietary enhancements by Valve, Sierra promises *Half-Life* will be the most exciting first-person action game available this holiday season.

While participating in a top-secret experiment deep underground, you and your colleagues bring across Ye Olde Alien Menace, who slaughter everyone in the lab but you. You have to fight your way to the surface, where you discover the aliens have made it out ahead of you and are fighting Government troops. Unfortunately, the non-human creatures are the least of your worries now, because the military wants to terminate your participation in the experiment — with extreme prejudice.

If you want to survive, you not only have to reach the aliens' homeworld and stop their plans for Earth, you've also got to stop the Government's plans for *you*. Along the way, you'll discover you need more than a quick trigger finger — you'll also have to draw on your talents for exploration and strategy. You'll also find out that not every creature or person you run into is your enemy, so you'd better be *real* good at snap judgments!

Half-Life will be in glorious 16-bit color, with sophisticated color lighting and environmental effects like translucency, dynamic textures and metallic surfaces. High-polygon count creatures will move fluidly, thanks to the game's proprietary character animation system.

More importantly, *Half-Life*'s advanced artificial intelligence (AI) system will have non-player beings demonstrating "emergent behavior," where a group of organisms behave like a single mass (i.e., "flocking behavior"). Many programmers consider emergent behavior one sign that an AI is behaving like an organic intelligence. Game creatures will also demonstrate their ability to assess threats, coordinate their attacks and anticipate player movements.

Valve, founded in 1996, consists of artists, programmers and designers who have worked for Microsoft, as well as on games like *Duke Nukem 3D* and various *DOOM* incarnations. For more information, visit either Sierra's Website at www.sierra.com, or Valve's Website at www.valvesoft.com.

WHEN DARKNESS FALLS

by Marc Dultz

For as long as I care to recall, I've subsisted on a heavy diet of hardcore military science fiction. There's something seductive and compelling about warfare in the future, with soldiers in high-tech armored spacesuits bouncing about on hostile planets or thundering down gargantuan starships and underground tunnels, battling for their lives against hordes of grotesque alien creatures. These valiant warriors, brandishing weapons of incredible destruction, are time and again charged with impossible tasks, and often called upon to defend humanity from extraterrestrial subjugation.

While fiendishly relating tales of Orcish chicanery and depraved devilcraft, Blizzard Entertainment has, in an astonishingly short time, established an immense and loyal following. It was only a matter of time, then, before the company would cast off its fantastical shackles, gaze up at the twinkling stars beckoning from afar and set their sights on worlds beyond. That time has come.

ALL MY SINS, REMEMBERED

The Blizzard design team originally set out to incorporate much of the original code from *Warcraft II* into its upcoming interstellar real-time strategy game, *Starcraft*. While logical, it quickly became apparent that certain enhancements earmarked for inclusion in *Starcraft* would pose severe design constraints which might compromise their ambitious goals. So, apart from the base network code, much of the original movement algorithms and other assorted code written for *Warcraft II* were deemed unsuitable for inclusion in *Starcraft*.

Like *Warcraft*, however, missions in *Starcraft* are quite varied, encompassing outer space, planetary and installation-based combat. Many of the missions are goal-specific as well, requiring, for instance, that a particular unit be escorted across the map, an artifact be located amidst a pile of wreckage, or a certain structure be destroyed. To take this concept further, certain units, such as interceptors and carriers, are employed during outer space missions — but are unavailable during enclosed, installation-based missions.

Three distinct species are portrayed in the game: the Terrans, a nomadic race of frail human castaways; the Protoss, a highly advanced race of psionically communicative aliens; and the Zerg, a genetically- mutated, highly adaptable race which burrows into a host organism to survive (see sidebar). Each race maneuvers, gathers resources and conducts combat in totally different ways. For

instance, the Terrans are forced to scavenge, salvaging parts from ruined hulks or mining asteroids to recover precious resources. What's more, the Terrans, unlike the Protoss or the Zerg, must build according to a hierarchical scheme (typical of either *Warcraft* game) which dictates that certain lower level structures be erected before more advanced structures can be developed.

In *Starcraft*, the core facility is never actually upgraded *per se* — instead, ancillary structures are erected. Once they are in place, the core facility's production capacity rises, while the rate at which damage is sustained is radically decreased.

Terran core facilities are retrofitted with a stylized VTOL (Vertical Take-Off and Landing) propulsion system. If they fall victim to enemy attack, they can, at the player's discretion, be detached from their

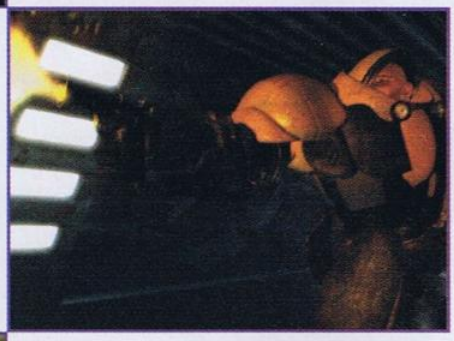
auxiliary structures, and transported above the surface to less dangerous regions. There are, of course, strings attached to this retreat-minded tactic. Core facilities will sustain disproportionately high rates of damage if attacked during this relocation phase. To counter this, friendly spacecraft should remain on hand to escort the core facility to its new site. Moreover, displaced core facilities are far less capable of warding off subsequent enemy attacks (unless new auxiliary structures are rapidly erected), and will produce units at far less effective rates.

Several structures can be grouped together, then hot-keyed to produce units on a continuing basis. Technological advances have a keen impact on play, too, although not nearly quite as dramatic as the system portrayed in the *Warcraft* series. For example, units can theoretically be fitted with new and more lethal weapons systems — although it should be stressed that a point of diminishing returns will develop somewhere along the way, which lessens their overall effectiveness. Therefore, if a unit is kitted out with Level Eight weaponry and an enemy unit has reached only Level Five firepower, the former unit isn't necessarily three times stronger than its adversary.

Mines and other resource sites will be included. In a departure of sorts, they can be excavated beyond exhaustion and mined at greatly reduced rates. In an effort to populate the game with a cast of eccentrics and other colorful characters, neutrals, interstellar pirates and an assemblage of other off-beat figures will be included. Likewise, heroes are expected to make return appearances, which not only influences the course of battle, but more importantly helps to achieve various mission-specific goals.

STUDY WAR NO MORE

Other, more profound mitigating factors influence the course of battle. For instance, elevated terrain permits units to fire up and down slopes. Units located atop higher terrain will not only be able to fire with more devastating effect, but will be more difficult to destroy if attacked by units situated at lower terrain levels. Even though line-of-sight issues have been addressed, they are not taken to the extreme that many tactical wargames are. Essentially, if



the firing unit's line-of-sight is blocked by intervening terrain, wreckage or other obstacles, the unit will still be able to shoot at its target, although the odds of hitting it are significantly reduced.

Certain Terran units are capable of torso-twisting in place: while the lower half of a robot may face in one direction, its complement of weaponry, incorporated into the upper torso, may be able to rotate and fire in another. In addition, unit facing now plays a significant role in combat. For instance, if a unit is being fired on from behind, it must about-face to engage the enemy. If attacked from two quarters, the player must determine, rather quickly, which direction his or her unit will face and which attacker it will engage first.

Many units are equipped with several different weapons systems of varying range and destructive capability. Once the unit moves within striking distance of an enemy vehicle or structure, it will automatically open fire (usually beginning with ranged fire systems) unless ordered by the player to stand down. As it closes with the enemy, other direct fire weapons systems will eventually come online, usually to inflict far greater damage to the targeted enemy unit. In any event, both types of weaponry are automatically resupplied, so players needn't worry about logistical concerns or micromanaging ammunition-depleted units.

Units can be "rubber-banded" into groups of varying sizes, types and strengths, or remain independent of one another. Any unit or group of units can be assigned and ordered to follow a series of waypoints, similar in scope to the type implemented in most flight simulations. Moreover, units can be issued a wide array of commands, such as *move, stop, attack, patrol, stand ground* and even *retrieve artifacts.* Certain units, namely Protoss Templars, can be issued special commands, such as summoning all-powerful Archons.

ARMOR

Starcraft's thoughtfully redesigned interface resembles a stylized cockpit belonging to a high-tech starship. Depending upon the race selected, the interface will be altered slightly to reflect the vagaries of each species. No matter — each interface will contain a strategic mini-map, an information panel, a communication transceiver and a bank of command buttons for controlling the actions of the unit.

As units are selected, the information panel located in the center of the interface displays a wireframe image of the highlighted unit; this depicts its current strength, attributes, inventory and sum total of all of its weapons upgrades. In addition, an inventory icon will be displayed showing which item or artifact the

units will react to consecutive clicking with a tongue-in-cheek, smart-aleck response.

Players seeking a cleverly crafted single player game will not be disappointed with *Starcraft*. Blizzard has also seen fit to introduce several important editing tools and communal aspects of play, though. For starters, *Starcraft* will be supported on Blizzard's critically acclaimed battle.net online network, ensuring that players will be able to find and challenge opponents worldwide, at their leisure and free of charge. What's more, an intelligently crafted player ranking system will be introduced, which will be able to match players of varying caliber and strength against one another with the help of a fully-featured handicapping system. Players can, at their discretion, adjust the at-start locations and order of battle of virtually any existing or player-created scenario.

Offline, players can create and edit their own maps, record their own .WAV files and design their own scenarios, stringing them into campaigns if they choose. Players will be able to select, from among other things, the lay of the land, the combatants, the nature of the engagement and even the victory conditions; they may even swap their fanciful creations with a friend. When all is said and done, *Starcraft* should satiate the appetite of every ravenous, real-time strategy gamer, offering a wealth of options, opportunities and opponents, which most games and game publishers have to date ignored or superficially addressed.

unit may be carrying (only one per unit). If a group of units is selected (up to eight for the Protoss, 10 for the Terrans and 12 for the Zerg), a truncated version of the wireframe image will appear in the information panel, depicting each member of the group.

The smaller communication transceiver, situated beside the information panel, serves as a mini video screen. It will display incoming transmissions from any unit or facility the player selects. From time to time cosmic storms, seismic events or battle damage will affect video transmission, causing static or other interference to disrupt the image. To make things interesting, a canned death and destruction sequence will be transmitted back to the player just before a unit or facility succumbs to enemy attack. In an effort to retain much of *Warcraft*'s jocular allure,

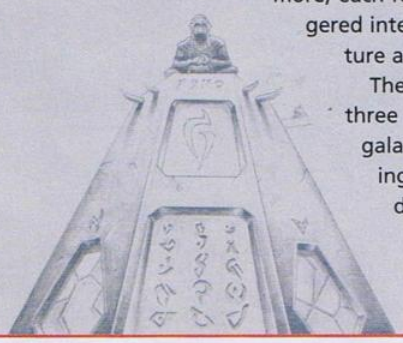
THE FOREVER WAR

The Blizzard design team has always maintained lofty aspiragering "Orcs vs. Humans" associations which gamers may still be harboring. Based upon what we've seen and learned, it appears as if their concerns, although founded upon convincing and

RACIAL INEQUALITY

Several legitimate contentions have plagued the *Warcraft* series, centering, for the most part, on the combatants, their supposedly distinct infrastructure and the nature and goal of each of the campaign-based missions. In reality, gameplay, from either sides' vantage point, is similar in style and scope. With both *Warcraft* and *Warcraft II*, Blizzard expended only cursory effort to differentiate between the attributes, hardships and objectives of the Human and Orcish tribes. Each sides' weaponry, facilities and intrinsic characteristics were, at best, superficially dissimilar. Once the impressive surface was scratched, players quickly realized that the ebb and flow of battle followed strangely parallel courses.

Bearing this in mind, Blizzard has gone to great lengths to redress the balance of power, by incorporating long overdue literary and other science fiction devices into its upcoming *Starcraft*. For beginners, the designers have pursued an ambitious and potentially daunting strategy, intermixing three radically divergent races into the fray. What's more, each race — Terran, Zerg and Protoss — is introduced into the game at staggered intervals, and reveals (in mysterious and overlapping phases) its history, culture and role in the intergalactic struggle.



The campaign game consists of over 30 different scenarios, divided into three acts. Players are first introduced to the Terrans (remnants of an intergalactic experiment gone awry), then the Zerg and finally the Protoss, learning their shortcomings and capabilities. By game's end, the player has discovered the reasons and repercussions of their actions, peeling back the petals of a remarkably detailed and sophisticated yarn, scenario by hard-fought scenario.

telling evidence, are but a distant memory once the game boots up. Wedding a carefully fabricated storyline, an intelligently constructed interface, next generation visual, auditory and multiplayer improvements, and a finely honed system of technologically interdependent races, *Starcraft* seems determined to maintain Blizzard's grip on the real-time strategy crown.

The Roots of Intergalactic Conflict

A SCANT FEW CENTURIES in the future, our world has undergone a radical transformation: Mankind has finally learned to live in peace. Under the jurisdiction of the newly-founded United Earth Government (UEG), racial, national and religious distinctions are no longer tolerated. The planet's governments have been replaced by a so-called "enlightened socialism."

In this utopian society, English serves as the basis for a common, unifying language. Dissidents, best defined as hackers, techno-pirates and other social malcontents, are viewed as misguided outcasts and treated with disdain by the UEG. Under the guise of "The Great Purification," UEG soldiers embark upon a new-age inquisition, ordered to purge society of its misfits by any means necessary.

During this "cleansing" phase, scientists discover a strange, pulsating energy source emanating from somewhere at the edge of the galactic rim. Not wishing to alarm the general public, the evidence is swiftly suppressed by the government, which control all forms of media. One particularly powerful governmental official, in an effort to glean more information about possible alien activity and its potential impact on Earth, manages to secure several thousand prisoners that were originally earmarked for elimination.

Secretly, these prisoners are processed and analyzed by UEG technicians, to determine which possess the requisite expertise, character and constitution to survive a long-term interstellar voyage. Only a few thousand pass muster. Without their knowledge, these prisoners are immediately placed in long-term cryogenic hibernation. Four huge starships are covertly constructed and readied for flight. With their in-stasis cargo placed on board, each ship is launched toward the pulsating signal at the galactic rim. Decades later, the ships crash-land at pre-plotted rendezvous points. After the onboard computers awaken the prisoners, they begin what will eventually become an arduous tale of survival amid the cold and inhospitable realm of deep space.

STARWARD BOUND

Long before the first Terran sets sail for parts unknown, the Xel'Naga — an advanced and benevolent race residing in a galaxy thousands of light years away — sought to create a perfect race that could peacefully settle the far-flung galaxies. Even though their labors have continually borne futile results, the Xel'Naga are persistent. Just as they begin to abandon hope, their experiments bear fruit. On the harsh jungle planet of Aiur, a curious species manages to thrive and flourish. The Xel'Naga dub this new species the Protoss, or "The First Born", and set about watching and studying their creation.

Exhibiting remarkable speed, agility and strength, the Protoss soon eclipse all of the other indigenous races populating Aiur. Able to communicate with one another by telepathy, they slowly coalesce into a simple, yet cohesive tribal society. Flushed with success, the Xel'-Naga eventually decided to pay a visit to their creation, going so far as to settle amidst the Protossian clans to study their experiment up close.

At first, the Protoss welcome the Xel'Naga as if they were divine beings, inspiring their offspring to even greater social and spiritual heights. Assimilating much of the Xel'Naga teachings into their own culture, the Protoss eventually grow suspicious of the Xel'Naga, impudently questioning their ultimate objectives. Realizing that they have made a grievous mistake, the Xel'Naga, upset by their failed attempt to create a perfect race, decide to pull up stakes and abandon their haughty children. Serious in-fighting erupts among the Protoss, which are soon followed by attacks against the Xel'Naga themselves. The surviving Xel'Naga depart Aiur in haste in their immense world-ships, setting a course toward the center of the galaxy, billions of lights years away from the strife-torn Protoss.

Dismayed but still not quite disheartened by their aborted endeavor, the shipbound Xel'Naga redouble their efforts to create a species more worthy of their talents. This time, though, the Xel'Naga adhere to the tenets of "purity of essence" instead of "purity of form." Eventually their efforts are rewarded, when a new, and altogether different species surfaces on the volcanic ash-world of Zerus.

Small and worm-like, the Zerg are the antithesis of the Protoss. Like their distant cousins, though, they are able to thrive even under the most inhospitable of climates and conditions. To survive their harsh environment, the Zerg seek out other species on the planet, capture them and then burrow into their charred flesh. Feeding on the nutrients contained within their hosts' bodies, the Zerg go a step further, and systematically merge with the hapless creature. In so doing, the Zerg symbiotically control their host, and eventually learn to use their acquired bodies to endure on the planet's surface.

Amazed by the adaptability of the Zerg, the Xel'Naga study their client species — only to make another, equally horrific discovery. Like Zerus' native species, the Xel'Naga are set upon by the multiplying Zerg, and are quickly assimilated and manipulated. Using the Xel'Naga's world-ships to vacate Zerus, the Zerg maraud the galaxy, marching inexorably toward a final showdown with the unwary Terrans and the leper-like Protoss.

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

ATTRIBUTES AND INNATE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OPPOSING FORCES

In Starcraft, the differences among the species aren't simply cosmetic. To shed any burdensome similarities with the Warcraft series, each race has been fashioned along unique lines and designed to adapt to their surroundings and the events unfolding about them in utterly different manners.

A network of burrowers, the Zerg, unlike the Protoss and the Terrans, are not carried to full gestation, and are instead hatched after undergoing a short incubation period. Young Zerg can be prematurely hatched, but do so at the loss of certain abilities and innate power.

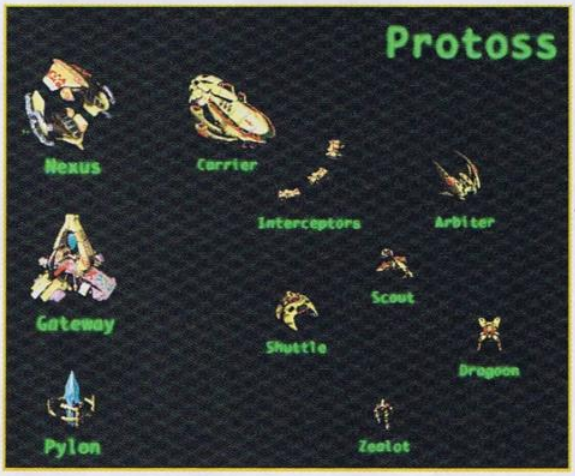
Zerg buildings are encompassed in a biological mesh that has come to be known as "The Creep." The Creep can be extended outwards, by repositioning Zerg larvae or by placing new buildings next to older buildings, especially spore colonies. The Creep serves as the nucleus of Zerg infrastructure; all Zerg facilities, except the Hatchery, must be built adjacent to the Creep. A strange and malleable land formation, the Creep is considered to be unbuildable terrain for either the Terrans or the Protoss.

Zerg buildings can regenerate if damaged and all Zerg units can, without assistance, identify heat trails and see at night. Moreover, Zerg units mature with time, gaining power and virility so long as they remain alive. Therefore, opposing players should destroy every newborn Zerg he or she comes in contact with before it's too late.

Because they have been thrust onto the interstellar stage with precious little to sustain them, the Terrans are forced to scavenge their abandoned ships, landing sites and even alien facilities to survive. As the player will discover, the Terrans, although a fragile race, are highly resourceful, able to adapt to the barren recesses of outer space with amazing alacrity.

For instance, many of their core installations are portable and can vacate a threatened area by lifting off from the surface. These installations can migrate to less hostile areas, or can resettle previous sites to regain access to any nearby auxiliary structures. Unfortunately, the auxiliary facilities surrounding the core installations are not able to provide resources to the player during the migratory phase. Moreover, auxiliary facilities are much more susceptible to damage if their core installation has departed.

To achieve greater efficiency, the Terrans are also able to combine two similar structures into a larger, more effective superstructure, capable of producing far greater resources than smaller facilities. Terran units can booby trap buildings as well — an especially nasty tactic. Certain units can even cloak, then sneak up and observe alien forces and installations. Although hidden from view, cloaked units aren't totally invisible to the opposing player, who can occasionally unmask their location with an illusory graphical effect.



Easily the most technologically advanced of the three species, the Protoss are nevertheless few in number, and must operate within certain unique restrictions to remain an effective force. First, the Protoss must erect a Nexus, an energy source which connects any encampments and installations with their remote homeworld. The Nexus powers both Protossian buildings and units — without it, their forces operate at curtailed levels of effectiveness. Worse, failure to restore power within a prescribed time period can prove fatal to the Protossian cause. Some units and structures will even cease to function unless power is quickly restored!

To remain a productive and effective fighting force, the Protoss may build energy pylons extending the range of a fully functioning Nexus. Whenever possible, opposing players should first seek to disrupt the Protoss power supply, then follow up with immediate assaults against the Protoss themselves.

A psionic race, the Protoss are capable of summoning more advanced and deadlier creatures. They can also sacrifice several less important Templar units to create an all-powerful Archon unit capable of unimaginable ferocity.

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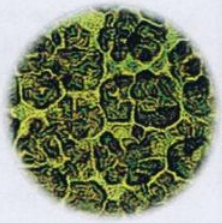

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TODAY, WE'D LIKE TO SHOW YOU HOW NICELY THEY'VE GROWN UP.

Red Sun Rising

A Preview of Pacific General

by Marc Dultz

REPRESENTING THE FIFTH and final installment of their illustrious "5-Star" strategy/wargame series, SSI's *Pacific General* depicts the entire breadth of the War in the Pacific fought during World War II. A monumental endeavor, given the scope of the conflict, *Pacific General* — like its brethren titles in the *General* series — takes a less exacting approach to modeling the subject than some of the more hardcore wargames available. Content to appeal to the proverbial "beer-and-pretzels" crowd, the game nevertheless contains all the requisite detail, delicate intricacies and myriad options to warrant a closer inspection.

A host of participatory nations are included in *Pacific General*, e.g., minor allies, Canada, India, France, Vichy France, Australia and New Zealand. Other minor nations, such as the Netherlands, appear occasionally. Major powers include Japan, the United States, China, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and Germany, although for all intents and purposes the United States and the Japanese Empire are portrayed as the two principal antagonists in the game.

Utilizing the tried and true wargaming system originally developed for *Panzer General*, *Pacific General* — SSI's third chapter in its stylized World War II saga — seeks to cover the entire struggle for control of the Pacific Ocean, the Far East and, victories permitting, lands beyond. Relying upon a somewhat traditional hexagonal overlay to regulate movement and terrain ownership, a simplified fire-and-maneuver sequence, an uncomplicated but effective method of replacing casualties and rebuilding cadres, and a point-based method of raising new units, *Pacific General* seems poised to make good on the promises that *Panzer General* so admirably kept several years ago.

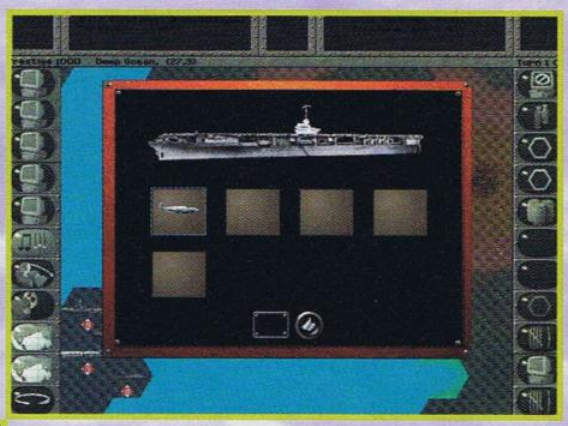
Here again, units are generically christened, although players can edit their units' names and profiles as they desire. The level of play remains a nebulous concept. At some points regimental or operational actions are depicted, while other battles are seemingly division or corps

"Pacific General reintroduces yet reinvigorates the Panzer General engine to its adoring public."

fectual sequel to *Panzer General,* which encompassed the War in Europe as seen from the Allied commanders' perspective — *Pacific General* at first blush more closely resembles *Panzer General's* flavor, charm and mystique. For starters, *Pacific General* relinquishes the rather unappealing Windows-based graphical user interface (GUI) presented in *Allied General*. Simultaneously, the updated system rids itself of the archaic scroll bars used for mapboard navigation in favor of the more refined pointer-sensitive plotting device utilized in *Panzer General*. In a sense then, *Pacific General* returns to its roots. Although developed to run under Windows 95, the game still achieves a DOS-based illusory effect, as if the interface was barely modified in accordance with the critics' vehement concerns.

engagements. For instance, the see-saw battle for control of Guadalcanal lasts upward of six months, while the seizure of Tarawa takes only three days to recast. Be that as it may, players should be able to acclimate themselves to the system and mechanics of play with relative ease.

Unlike *Allied General* — a rather ineffectual sequel to *Panzer General,* which encompassed the War in Europe as seen from the Allied commanders' perspective — *Pacific General* at first blush more closely resembles *Panzer General's* flavor, charm and mystique. For starters, *Pacific General* relinquishes the rather unappealing Windows-based graphical user interface (GUI) presented in *Allied General*. Simultaneously, the updated system rids itself of the archaic scroll bars used for mapboard navigation in favor of the more refined pointer-sensitive plotting device utilized in *Panzer General*. In a sense then, *Pacific General* returns to its roots. Although developed to run under Windows 95, the game still achieves a DOS-based illusory effect, as if the interface was barely modified in accordance with the critics' vehement concerns.



CODE OF THE ANCIENT WARRIOR

Like its forebears, *Pacific General* incorporates a "rock-paper-scissors" approach to convey the sense of combined arms warfare. While the *blitzkrieg* — or "lightning war" combat — espoused by the German high command (and so brilliantly portrayed in *Panzer General*) isn't terribly appropriate in the insect-infested swamps, dense jungles and heavily fortified islands of the south and central Pacific, the game exudes the same fluidity, meaningful interactivity and heightened tension first illustrated in *Panzer General*.

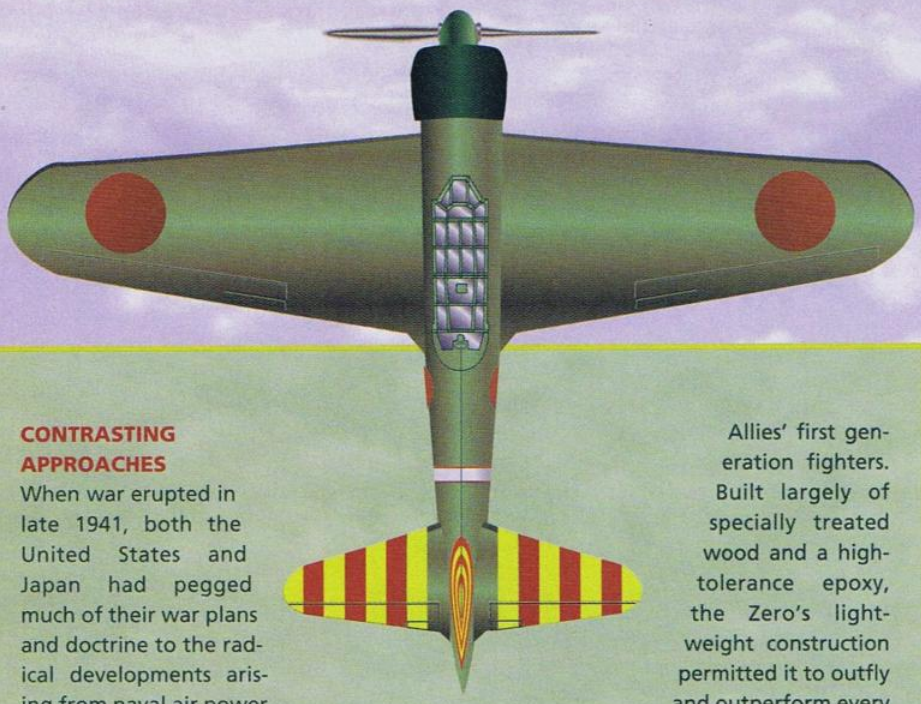
Other familiar system aspects are conspicuously present in *Pacific General*: core and auxiliary units, prestige, experience levels, entrenchment, unit upgrades and purchases, suppression, stacking restrictions, etc. The free-flowing fire and maneuver system is likewise in attendance, representing ship-to-ship, air-to-air and surface-to-surface actions. Add to this the many possible permutations each type and class of unit can cause or incur, and the gamer is instantly immersed in a no holds barred slugfest replete with both tactical and strategic decision-making. Easy to assimilate, the *Pacific General* system contains enough tangenital qualities and improvements to readily delineate it from its progenitors. On that note, let's begin with the campaign game.

PATHS OF GLORY

Two campaign games will be modeled, one portraying the Japanese onslaught, and the other the American force's reactive, then proactive, stance after the attack at Pearl Harbor. The Japanese player will initially be tasked to invade and conquer China. If successful, s/he will subsequently march south to first capture mineral-abundant Singapore, proceed into Burma, then go west across India. A victory over the British forces defending India heralds a climactic struggle in the oil-rich Middle East, as the Japanese Army links up with Rommel's Afrika Korps somewhere south of the Caucasus in Persia. In theory, the Axis armies have supposedly smashed their way past the vaunted British defenses at El Alamein, through Egypt and into TransJordan.

Sometime in 1941, the Japanese will

ABOVE: Carriers contain up to five aircraft units. LEFT: Naval action plays an extremely important role in Pacific General. BELOW: The battle generator can create virtually any scenario.



CONTRASTING APPROACHES

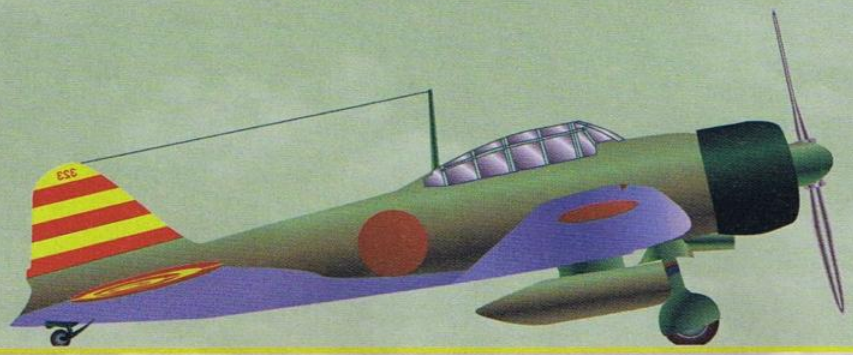
When war erupted in late 1941, both the United States and Japan had pegged much of their war plans and doctrine to the radical developments arising from naval air power. Although the use of torpedo planes and dive bombers forever dramatically affected the conduct and prosecution of both air and naval warfare, both planes had their drawbacks. Laden with heavy bomb loads or torpedoes and encased in heavy, armored airframes, these aircraft were exceedingly slow and were therefore easy targets for trained airborne marksmen. Sea-based fighters were developed as the only really effective means of providing aerial protection from marauding enemy aircraft, doubling — where numbers and situations dictated — as marauders themselves.

For the Japanese, the much ballyhooed Mitsubishi A6M Zero ruled the skies over the Pacific well into the mid-war years. Virtually invincible at the outbreak of the conflict, the Zero relied on a daunting combination of speed, high climbing rate and a tight turning radius to outduel the best of the Allies' first generation fighters. Built largely of specially treated wood and a high-tolerance epoxy, the Zero's lightweight construction permitted it to outfly and outperform every aircraft the Allies could field against it.

" The much ballyhooed A6M Zero ruled the skies over the Pacific well into the mid-war "

Unfortunately for the pilots who flew them, the Zeros' nimble flight characteristics came at a steep price. The Zero lacked self-sealing fuel tanks, which meant that if they were struck by air or ground fire, they were likely to immediately burst into flames. Furthermore, it's unheralded performance was owed largely to its wooden construction, which was therefore equally susceptible to enemy fire. As well, the Zero was unable to dive very quickly and, at speeds over 250 mph, forfeited much of its all-important maneuverability to maintain level flight.

A dynamic and unsurpassed aircraft for its time, the Zero was eventually eclipsed by a host of vastly improved and radically new Allied aircraft, which wrested the skies from the once indomitable Japanese.



follow up their dramatic series of conquests with the fateful surprise air attack on Pearl Harbor, which will draw the Americans into the now globally expansive war. Again, the Japanese player's aim is to reverse history and stem the tide of war materiél flowing from America to its far-flung forces and bases, while safeguarding her/his own interests.

An unbroken series of decisive victories against the Allied forces will eventually result in an invasion of Hawaii, then an assault on the continental US at San Francisco. After seizing the "City by the Bay," the Japanese forces will have to ultimately drive into America's heartland. Their objective is to once again link up with the German forces which are, in theory, advancing westward after having conquered Washington, DC.

The American campaign mirrors history to a great extent, while obviating Pearl Harbor to commence with the naval and aerial clash at Midway Island. The dropping of the atomic bomb is but a footnote to history as the American forces storm ashore on the Kanto Plain in an effort to seize Tokyo. In theory, then, the war can drag out into 1946, well past V-J Day's actual occurrence.

Again, *Pacific General* follows in the footsteps of its earlier incarnations, retaining the same interactive, "history-in-the-making" philosophy which has endeared the series to many a gamer. At several points throughout the campaign, players will have to make significant choices regarding the course and prosecution of the war. For instance, the Japanese player can temporarily postpone an air attack at Pearl Harbor, instead laying siege to the heavily manned but ill-equipped British garrisons at Singapore and Maylasia. Typically the Japanese player will only be afforded this luxury of choice if he or she has achieved decisive victories in each of the preceding battles.

The campaign games are challenging but lengthy; therefore gamers can choose to play any of over two dozen set piece battles also destined for inclusion. The player won't be able to select which auxiliary units he or she will initially begin with, although new units can still be purchased to augment their forces. The scenarios serve to soften the game's whitewashed learning curve while providing necessary experience, which will ideally help the player tackle the more troublesome campaigns.

"Pacific General seems poised to make good on the promises the Panzer General so admirably kept several years ago."

LINE OF DEPARTURE

Pacific General, to some degree, reroutes the *Panzer General* mechanics of play to more accurately reflect the ebb and flow of action in the Pacific Theater. As an example, specific Japanese units execute *banzai* — fanatical suicide charges against Allied ground positions.

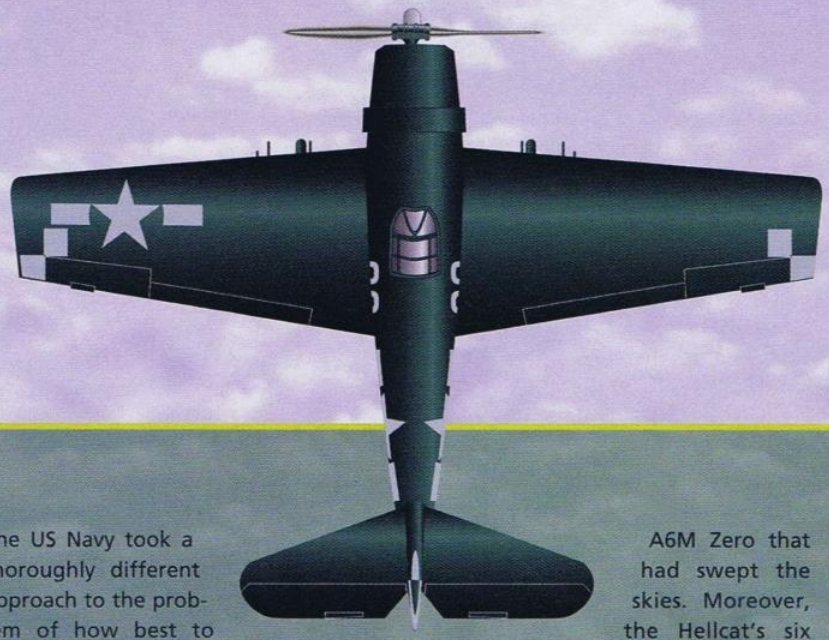
Terrain has a dramatic impact on movement and combat. Everything from beaches to palm trees to dense jungles are depicted — which, of course, reduce ground movement to a dismal crawl. Even ocean depths have been taken into account. Deep-draft naval vessels — such as crusiers and battleships — along with submarines are, in many instances, unable to draw up to the beaches to provide naval gunfire. Smaller surface craft must thereafter be called upon to help support any amphibious landings or ward off enemy vessels.

The interface has been modified and updated, too. While the traditional interface continues to bookend the map screen, units can now be given orders by double-clicking on their icon. In fact, when aircraft carriers are double-clicked, a graphical representation of the ship appears, showing what types and how many aircraft are below decks. In a single turn, an aircraft carrier can dispatch every available aircraft type on board, systematically filling the skies with a lethal cordon of steel and lead.

Certain scenarios, such as the fierce naval battles that transpired up and down the Solomons in 1942, will be portrayed as night action. Dramatically affecting the fog of war, air and naval units will be penalized severely, their line-of-sight brutally curtailed.

In a radical departure, units of any type or class may move several times in a game turn, if they still retain any unexpended movement allowance. While they can not attack twice in any given turn, a unit can in theory move, stop, then move again to flank or envelop an enemy force or capture a strategic objective. Curiously, units that move, then attack, are not permitted to move again that player turn. Decisive victories will trigger the arrival of new equipment earlier than it would ordinarily be made available. The Japanese, for example, may receive heavy tanks or sorely needed anti-tank guns if they remain on track and carry the war all the way to the American shores.

Players may recall that *Panzer General* — and to some extent *Allied General*



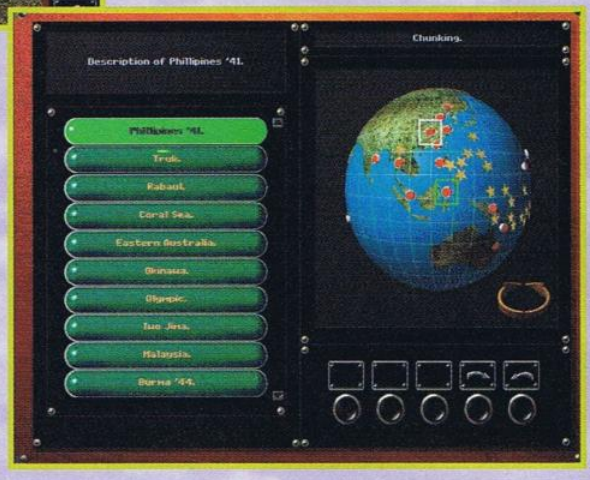
The US Navy took a thoroughly different approach to the problem of how best to provide aerial protection for their single-engine bombers and torpedo aircraft. Instead of building an agile but highly vulnerable wooden fighter as the Japanese had done, Grumman, at the insistence of the US Navy, opted for a much heavier, more durable fighter to achieve air parity.

"The F6F Hellcat packed an equally devastating combination of speed, power and durability."

Introduced to the war effort in January, 1943, the F6F Hellcat packed an equally devastating combination of speed, power and durability. Capable of attaining speeds in excess of 386 mph (courtesy of its huge 2,000 horsepower radial engine), the Hellcat could easily catch up to the somewhat slower A6M Zero that had swept the skies. Moreover, the Hellcat's six .50-caliber machine guns could easily tear into the Zero's thin, wooden hide. Oftentimes one short machine gun burst could instantly flame a fleeing Zero. Finally, its thick, steel-reinforced airframe could ward off repeated attacks by the outmoded 7.7mm gun mounted in the nose of the Zero. Japanese pilots often had to rely on their 20mm wing-mounted cannons to deal with the Hellcats and other durable American fighters which eventually came into service. For the Japanese, the Hellcat was only a prelude of things to come.

— employed WWII video clips as scenario segues, and voice actors to emulate period narration. *Pacific General* goes one step further, using radio broadcasts from infamous announcers such as Axis Charlie, Tokyo Rose and Lord Haw Haw to heighten the experience. WWII newsreel and documentary footage liberally blanket the program, further enhancing the mood and ambient qualities of what can safely be described as an absorbing game.

Pacific General will feature a glossary to further up the ante, describing the use and functionality of every unit portrayed in the game, as well as a tutorial which walks the layperson through a short scenario.



ABOVE: Once the troops wade ashore, there's lots of tough jungle fighting ahead. RIGHT: Scenarios are graphically depicted on a fully rotoscoped world. BELOW: Everything is fully customizable. Slide bars have been used to toggle various criteria.

MAIL CALL

In a move to remain in vogue with the industry and wargamers, *Pacific General* will include a host of multiplayer options. In typical fashion, an e-mail component will again be made available, permitting players to send and reply to game moves at their leisure. In addition, *Pacific General* will be both modem (using Direct Connect from Direct X3) and network capable (through either IPX or TCP/IP systems), supporting two player, head-to-head combat. Unfortunately, SSI was reluctant to discuss which multiplayer networks (Total Entertainment Network (TEN) or MPlayer are chief among them) would endorse an online version of *Pacific General*, or if separate scenarios were being conceived with online gaming systems and the Internet-oriented community in mind. Moreover, *Pacific General* will reportedly include an opponent replay option, entitling nonphasing players the opportunity to watch and study their opponent's offline movement and combat phases.

SSI has also indicated that *Pacific General* will ship with a robust battle generator permitting players to reconfigure, modify or customize any scenario (which may include any of the over 1,000 units depicted in the series). Unit tables and information will be included as full-color Acrobat-compliant PDF files, which can be printed out in full color at the player's discretion. Using pregenerated maps, players can create new scenarios and reconfigure weather conditions, nationalities and even victory conditions. While players won't be able to create new maps, nor can they alter existing terrain beyond the editing of victory, deployment and entry hexes, etc., the battle generator will work in conjunction with either preloaded *Panzer* or *Allied General* scenario maps included with the game, thereby allowing players to adjust the order of battle for each and every scenario. Players therefore will be able to import or export units as they see fit, modifying any scenario in either the Pacific or European Theaters of Operation. Ever wonder what it would be like to launch a *banzai* charge at Anzio, or to unleash a full-fledged panzer assault on Guadalcanal? Well, General, you may finally get your chance.

SHIP TO SHORE TRANSMISSION

It's safe to say that *Pacific General* isn't being developed as another port, haplessly redressing the Emperor in fancy new clothes. While to some extent "East does meet West," various modifications have been made which contrast the inherent differences between the European *blitzkrieg* style of warfare against the amphibious, island-hopping battles which characterized the War in the Pacific. Players for the first time will be able to purchase and launch naval vessels, ranging in type and class from pesky but nimble torpedo boats all the way up to super battleships. Everything from jeep (escort) carriers to LST's are included, from the perilous GATO Class submarines to the sleek yet deadly Missouri and Musashi superbattleships. Moreover, a wide assortment of destroyers, cruisers and other ships will be included, all supporting the new "queen of the seas" — the aircraft carriers. Even the

"Pacific General follows in the footsteps of its earlier incarnations, retaining much of the same interactive philosophy"

Shinano, a supercarrier perhaps without equal, makes a cameo appearance.

Marine amphibious transports will be segmented into two classes. Landing ships that were capable of off-loading armor onto invasion beaches will be depicted, allowing tanks to "swim" ashore. LSTs are incapable of carrying any additional troops so their value is restricted. Merchantmen and cargo vessels primarily used as troop transports are classified and will function as such.

Various hypothetical units will be portrayed as well. For instance, the Japanese player will have at his or her disposal various suicide units to help defend their homeland from invasion. In addition, the game will include several French, German and Italian aircraft and aircraft carriers, such as the Graf Zeppelin, scheduled for introduction but never quite fully realized prior to the war's end. Moreover, since the simulation can linger well past 1945, several types of ground, sea and air forces will see service. The Japanese will field various heavy tanks, for instance, while the Americans lay the keel for their awesome Montana class battleships that were cancelled midstream in 1943. In addition, both sides will have available jet aircraft and other fully-realized technical achievements that were just transitioning from the drawing board to the armaments industries.

A wide array of piston-engine aircraft are depicted, too, from the low and slow torpedo planes to the huge four-engine bombers, which incinerated dozens of Japanese cities. Too numerous to mention, players can expect to command, among other things, A6M Zeros and F6F Hellcats (see sidebar), Betty medium bombers, PBY Catalinas seaplanes, TBD Dauntless torpedo planes and Avenger dive bombers, P-40 Warhawks (of Flying Tiger fame), F4U Corsairs, B-26 Mitchell medium bombers, B-17 heavy bombers, and the high-altitude B-29 Superfortress superheavy bombers which ultimately ended the war with the twice-delivered Atomic Bomb.

FROM THE HALLS OF MONTEZUMA

In four years time, SSI has taken the *Panzer General* engine full circle; slowly migrating from the battle, scarred fields of Europe to the scorching deserts of North Africa, across the wind-swept hillocks of fantastical lore to the coldest and darkest recesses of outer space. *Pacific General* reintroduces yet reinvigorates the engine to its adoring public, taking the time-tested system to its most evolutionary, logical conclusion; back to its World War II genesis. Combining all of the critically acclaimed concepts and features that ignited the original wargaming blaze with some invaluable refinements and perceptive enhancements, SSI has again stoked the fires, intent on bringing the 5-Star Series to a well-deserved, if long overdue, full boil.

TOP: With the click of a mouse button, units can be issued a host of commands. ABOVE: Where possible, amphibious invasions should be stopped at the beach. RIGHT: The unit casualty screen keeps track of every battle casualty.

FURTHER READING

If you'd like more information on the War in the Pacific or the elaborate preparations for the planned invasion of Japan some fifty years ago, *CGE* recommends the following sources of information:

Gailey, Harry A., The War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay. *Presidio, 1995.*

Westheimer, David. Death is Lighter than a Feather. *UNT Press, 1995.*

Cook, Haruko Taya and Theodore F., An Oral History of Japan. *The New Press, 1992.*

Deac, Wil, World War II Magazine, "Undercover", *p. 20. May 1997.*

Allen, Thomas B. and Polmar, Norman. Code Name Downfall. *Simon & Schuster, 1995.*

CGE

INTERSTELLAR EMPIRE BUILDING 101

Note: This course is intended for emperors of all levels. No prior experience in intergalactic logistics, fleet management or interstellar cartography is necessary.

Prerequisites:

- A thorough understanding that you, as the Supreme Leader, can do no wrong.
- The desire to build a thriving intergalactic empire.
- A thorough understanding that you, as the Supreme Leader, can do no wrong.
- The ability to ignore the obliteration of countless civilizations, to control huge battle fleets, and to administer to the affairs of millions of aliens.
- A thorough understanding that you, as the Supreme Leader, can do no wrong.
- The knowledge that doing things your way is, of course, the only correct way.
- A thorough understanding that you, as the Supreme Leader, are always right.

Those players who possess at least one of the aforementioned qualifications have the requisite fundamental skills and/or background to master the art of empire building. Recruits should immediately report to Star Command Headquarters, Circuit B, Sagitarrian Concourse. Holographic facsimiles and stand-in clones will not be accepted.

Pax Imperia 2: Eminent Domain (Pax 2) is, for all practical purposes, two games. As a real-time, space-based strategy game, *Pax 2* has been designed to retain those aspects we commonly associate with real-time strategy gaming. More importantly, *Pax 2* contains the tremendous depth of detail that hardcore enthusiasts and micromanagers continually crave. Entirely mouse-driven, *Pax 2* is based on the award-winning *Pax Imperia ("Peace Through Empire")*, which was released for the Macintosh back in 1993.

Heliotrope's goal is to create a great game from the ground up, by true gamers who love and play games. This ideal comes together in *Pax 2*. Every feature is designed to make game playing smooth and engrossing, while at the same time providing uncompromising depth and intricacy for the strategy aficionado. *Pax 2* is built on a solid conceptual base: Conquer the universe and be the last player left standing when the cosmic dust settles.

Players can annihilate all who dare oppose them by utilizing hundreds of technologies available. In effect, players build increasingly deadlier fleets, along with related defense systems situated on the planets' surfaces. Although *Pax 2's* real-time combat engine allows for plenty of carnage, brute military force isn't the only way to pummel your opponent. Let's face it, pure economic muscle has its upside as well. Delving into the seedier side of empire building, like bribing a few foreign diplomats harboring dreams of fomenting rebellion or destabilizing a pesky alien foe, is also appealing. The bottom line is that *Pax 2* gives players the tools and means of marrying cunning diplomatic overtures, sound strategic planning, and keen tactical awareness into a cohesive and insurmountable doctrine.

Players may, if they so choose, select from a list of a pre-defined alien species to rule. However, because some players will have the desire to create a genetically superior race, they're also given the option of designing their own species by altering things like aggression levels, longevity, and even the type of atmosphere they can breathe. There are literally thousands of genetic permutations that exist, so experimentation can be its own reward. Genetic mutation, therefore, depends on the player's objective, and how they ultimately plan to achieve it.

Size isn't everything, but it means a lot

Setting up a game space is crucial to game play. In *Pax 2* players can create a universe with up to 80 stars and ten planets per star, which results in up to 800 colonizable planets. Often, though, smaller is better, especially since up to 16 human or computer-controlled players can compete. Universe size should depend upon how many empire builders enter the game or how fast a game they desire. For instance, a game consisting of 16 players and 20 star systems can get hairy pretty fast.

The name in and of itself aptly communicates the underlying sentiment of the game. Eminent Domain, defined as the right of a government to seize control of anything it feels like, adequately sums up what the player is trying to achieve.

Every aspect of game play has been thoroughly thought out. For instance, the player's moves can be initiated directly from the main control room. This makes switching from combat in one sector to managing a newly-established colony in another a simple and fast matter.

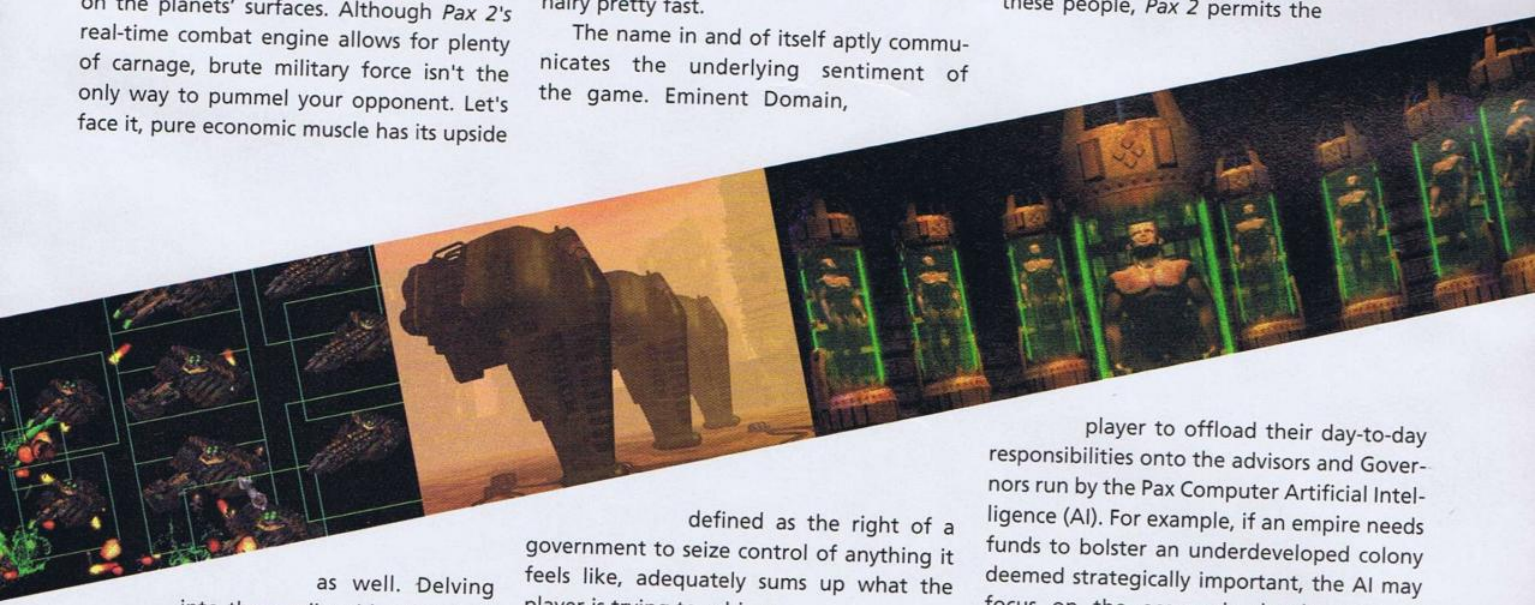
In any given game, an emperor may need to fend off bribery attempts against his cabinet, using whatever financial resources he can call upon. In an effort to guarantee the technological advances needed to survive mounting military crises, players may also negotiate treaties with foreign empires. It's up to each player to determine where he or she would like to focus his or her energy, and in what manner.

"We have nothing to fear but fear itself."

Try telling that to a world of nine billion citizens staring at an enemy fleet parked menacingly in orbit above them. If only their emperor had invested funds in the research of shield generators! At the very least, s/he could have negotiated an alliance with a stronger player to defend those sectors of space where conflagrations would most likely erupt....

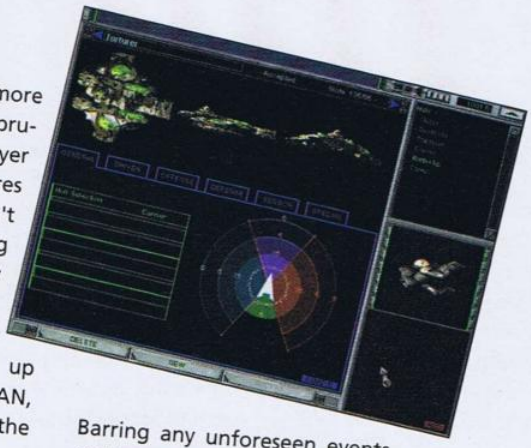
Fear not, though. *Pax 2* is as flexible and as dynamic as any gamer might imagine. The chance of forestalling doom or quelling insurrection rests with the player, and the player alone.

Many gamers would rather not worry about micromanaging and administering every conceivable aspect of the game. For these people, *Pax 2* permits the player to offload their day-to-day responsibilities onto the advisors and Governors run by the Pax Computer Artificial Intelligence (AI). For example, if an empire needs funds to bolster an underdeveloped colony deemed strategically important, the AI may focus on the economic development of a wealthier planet, developing research



centers so that funds will become more quickly available. The AI will make prudent, reasonable choices that the player can use, unless more extreme measures are called for. Therefore, players won't witness weird situations developing where the computer suddenly becomes your nemesis, attacking and threatening to wage war again.

Pax Imperia 2 will accommodate up to 16 players connected over a LAN, direct modem connection, or across the Internet.



Barring any unforeseen events, Heliotrope also plans to include a turn-based variant which can be played over a network or on a single PC.

Therefore, players can expect to be able to enjoy both hot-seat and play by e-mail games.

The Final Word

New players can dive right in and begin playing, while advanced players can have a game they can hunker down with and enjoy for months on end. In the end, we feel that no gamer will ever play the same game twice. CGE

The KX-32 Firehawk

Origin: Terran Defense Force, maiden voyage 13 September 2263 (Sol Sector Galactic Mean Time +12:05:07:10)

Type: Fleet Interceptor

Propulsion: Two 147G-capable TDI Fury IV pulse-fusion engines

Dimensions: Maximum Span 25.7m, LOA 42.1m, Height (gear-down configuration) 5.8m (gear-up configuration) 4.2m

Displacement: Unladen 23,078kg, Maximum load 54,639kg (includes external fuel tanks and weapons bays)

Performance: Maximum speed (in-system) 0.47 C, (out-system) 0.71C. Maximum delta-V degrades to 103G with full load-out. Maximum refuel range is three light months at cruise speed (minimum transfer orbits at no more than 10G burn).

Background: The Terran Defense Force commissioned the development of the KX-32 Firehawk in response to a growing perceived threat from out-world colonies failing to adequately blockade their sectors against enemy fleet incursions. The Firehawk was designed to be a cheap yet effective fleet interceptor in sectors where full-time stationing of a fleet was deemed impractical. In this role, the Firehawk has exceeded all of its design and mission criteria.

Design: The Firehawk uses an advanced cera-metal tile hull which is capable of withstanding temperatures in excess of 7,500K. The cera-metal alloy also provides extreme rigidity and structural strength, which permits the frame to withstand the extreme accelerations maintained by the twin pulse-fusion engines. In-flight atmospheric and climate controls are handled by the improved Type II TerraSphere 7 life support system. The TerraSphere 7 is the same environmental control system (ECS) used in the famed KX-23 Pitbull deep-strike craft, and has proven reliable during the thousands of combat missions it flew in the Rift War.

Astro-Navigation: Nav/Comm functions are handled by the Nav/Comm officer in conjunction with a SolSys 78 Target Acquisition and Positional Reference Computer (TAPRC). The SolSys 78 was expressly designed for use by the KX-32, and represents an unparalleled advance in in-flight communications and targeting systems. Primary search modes are track-while-scan neutrino-pulse imaging or track-lock-spatio inferometric scanning. Communications capabilities include pulse narrow-beam lasers, burst RF and coded gravity pulse.

Armament: Primary armament include four NovaPulse LRE-52 Hellfire particle cannons, six General System MRS-7 Triton missile launchers (50 missiles per tube) and a Peregrine WaSP-II close defense system. Additional weapon load-outs include — but are not limited to — mission-specific configured arrays for planetary (in-atmosphere) strike and fleet close support roles. Defenses are limited due primarily to the craft's light cera-metal hull and a Quarks Systems level one pulse shield generator. Current and near-term military doctrine has migrated away from the use of shields on small attack craft, leaving the Firehawk as a viable weapons platform, in a strike capacity, well into modern times.

● (Source: *Jane's Intergalactic Defense Weekly*, 20-27 December, 2268 inclusive)

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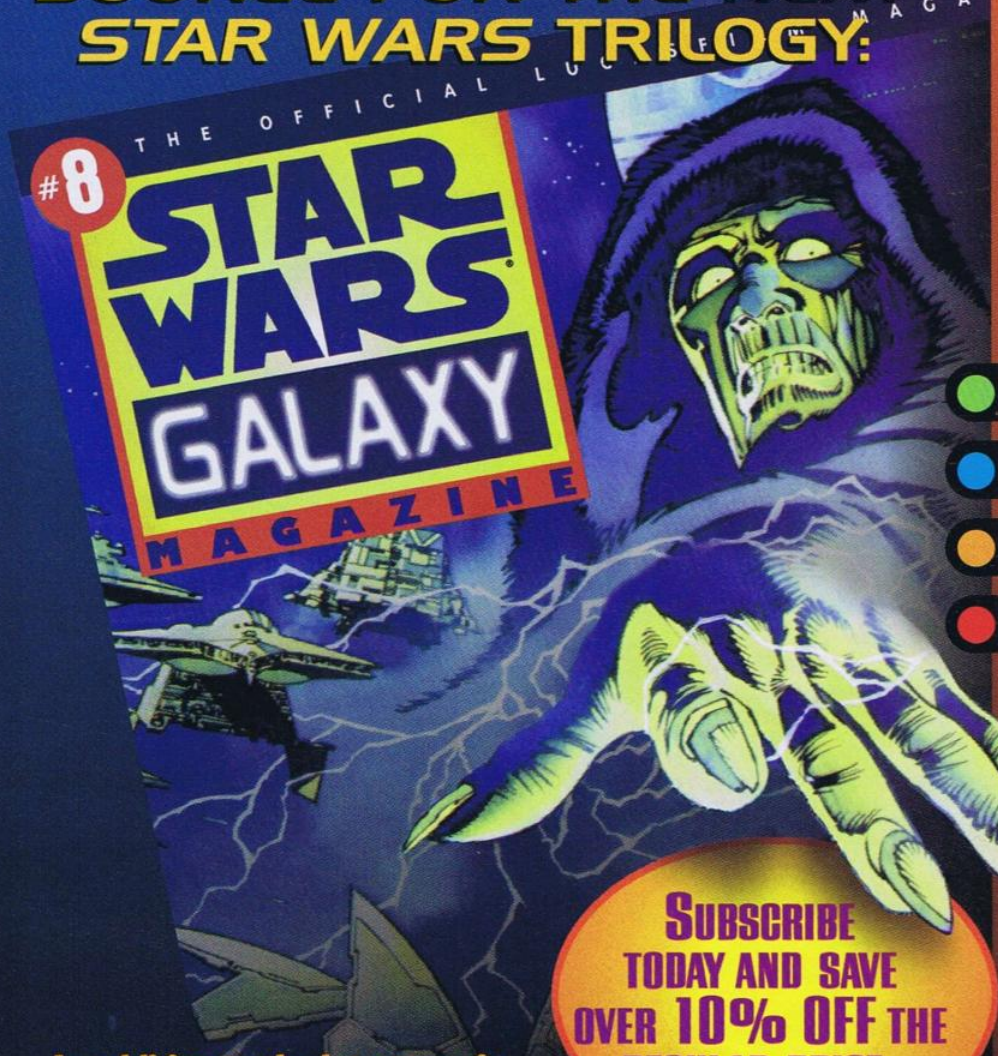

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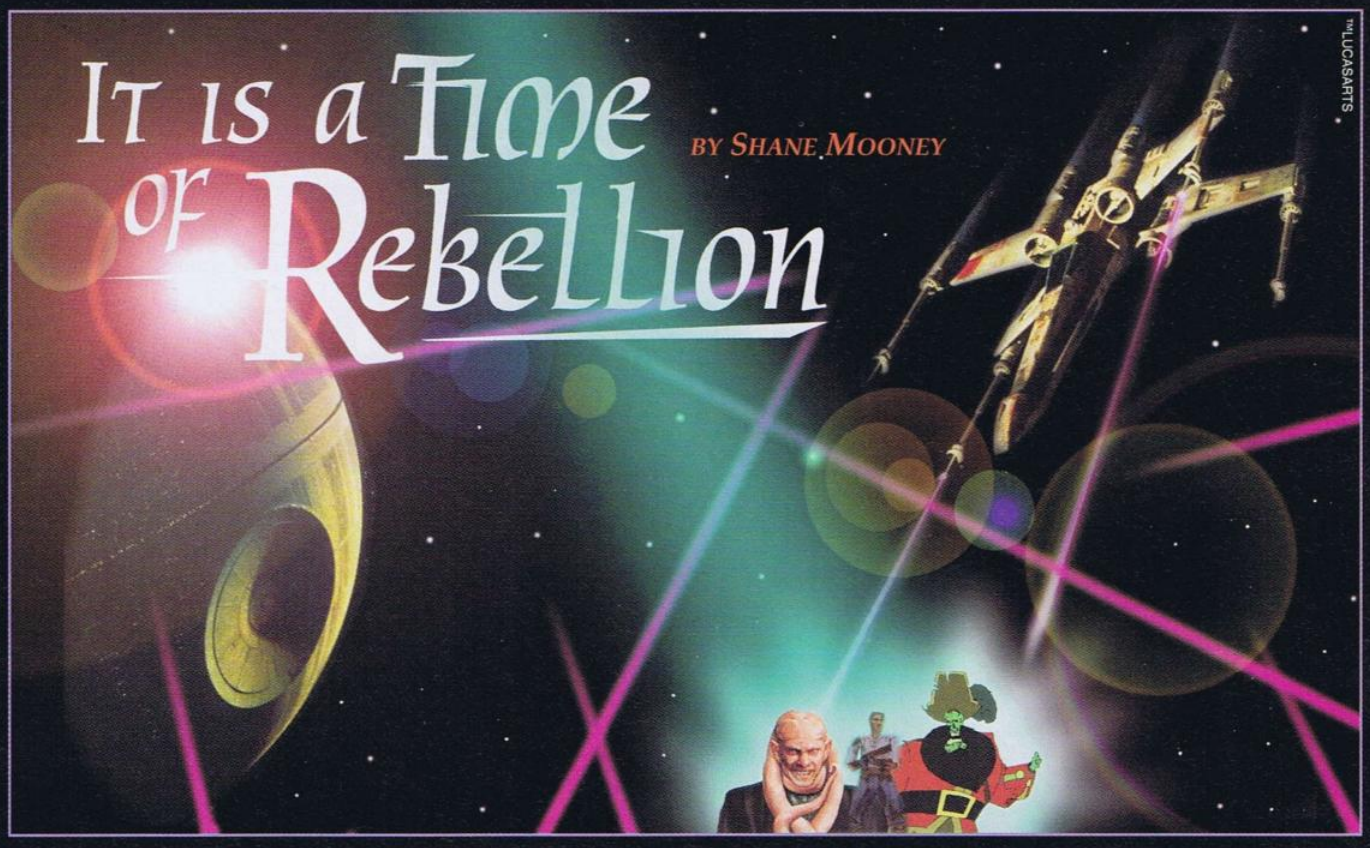
MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

It is a Time of Rebellion

BY SHANE MOONEY



LucasArts, Then & Now

LUCASARTS is only slightly more prolific than its namesake, producer/director George Lucas. However, when LucasArts releases a game, it's a safe bet that it'll become an overnight hit. Their products, many of which are played years after their initial release, reside in just about every gamer's Hall of Fame: *X-Wing*, *TIE Fighter*, *Dark Forces*, *Rebel Assault*, and even their recent *Star Wars* amalgamation *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*. The list is as long as the *Star Wars* credits.

Although the lineup is stellar, intergalactic action titles represent a more recent addition to LucasArts' product mix. Much of their success is owed to more subdued, laid-back adventure games, beginning with the low-res yet highly popular *Maniac Mansion*, developed for the now-extinct Commodore computer. Although the *Star Wars*-inspired games have received their fair share of accolades, it may turn out that their many adventure games — *Day Of The Tentacle*, *Sam & Max Hit The Road* and *Full Throttle* — will earn them the adoration and respect they so richly deserve.

There's also the phenomenally successful *Secret of Monkey Island* saga. Aging gracefully with time, these older graphic adventure titles may represent LucasArts' crowning achievement. Hoping to pick up where they left off, *The Curse Of Monkey Island*, LucasArts' third installment in the wondrous series, seems destined to steal the show.

Curses, Spoiled Again

When last we left off, our reluctant hero Guybrush Threepwood thought he'd disposed of LeChuck (that nefarious no-goodnik) for the second —and hopefully final — time. But like cockroaches in the night, LeChuck has somehow managed to creep back and haunt him.

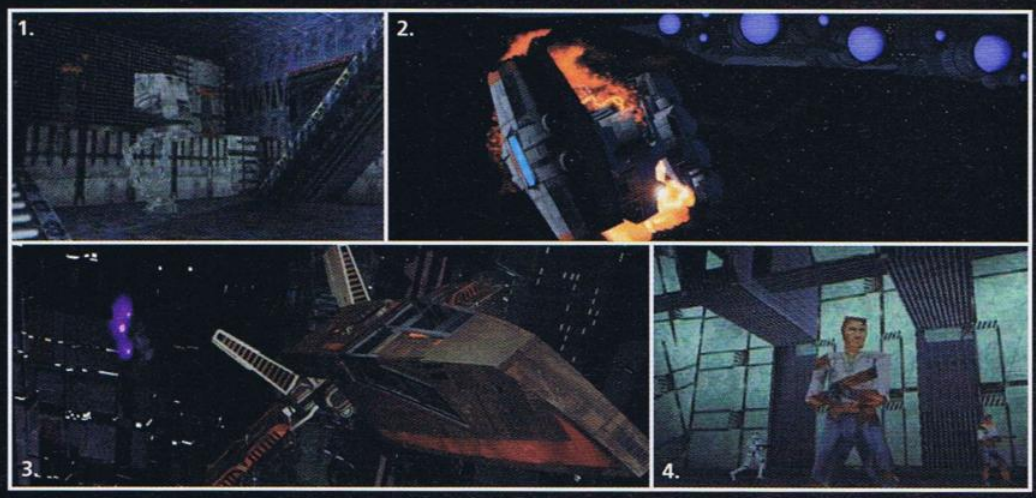
In this chapter, we learn that LeChuck is now attempting to woo Elaine Marley, Guybrush's one true love, and make her his demon bride. Guybrush, also hoping to sample wedded bliss with Elaine, inadvertently slips a cursed ring on her finger. The ring magically changes Elaine into a solid gold statue. Guybrush's task is to somehow break the curse, remove the ring and reclaim his 14-karat gold bride. Along the way, Guybrush will have to muster all of his swashbuckling savvy, fighting off a legion of scurvy-ridden villains and grog-guzzling pirates if he hopes to, once and for all, defeat LeChuck and his dastardly plans.

OK, all this sounds like pretty serious adventure gaming stuff, huh? Well, *Curse* is loaded with enough dry humor and sarcastic wit to make even Dennis Miller, the caustic stand-up comedian, look like an utterly repressed politician. The subtle jibes and out-and-out hilarity that made *Sam & Max*, *Full Throttle*, and the earlier *Monkey Island* games such monumental hits are again in attendance with *Curse*.

Throughout the story, *Curse* maintains its charming and whimsical innocence, while never once distracting the player from his ultimate goal. I guess this doesn't come as shocking news to anyone who has played any of the earlier *Monkey Island* games.

In fact, fans of the series should have little problem diving into the story, since *Curse* shares many of the same charac-

1. This sequel to *Dark Forces* promises to include high-res graphics and full motion video.
2. An opening cutscene sets the tone for your quest in *Jedi Knight*.
3. Along with Stormtroopers, you'll find plenty of other *Star Wars* regulars, including AT-STs.
4 *Quake*-like in their dimensions because *JK* uses a true 3D graphics engine as well.



ters and locales with the first two games. "If you played the first game, you'll know all about LeChuck and Guybrush and feel right at home," noted lead animator and co-project leader Larry Ahearn, whose credits include *Monkey Island 2* and *Full Throttle*. But unlike *The X-Files* or similar series, newcomers to *Curse* needn't worry about stumbling over incomprehensible plots or strange events alluded to in earlier games. "Anyone picking this up for the first time will have no problems getting into the game," added Jonathan Ackley who, along with Ahearn, developed *Curse*. Ackley went on to add that "*The Curse of Monkey Island* will include all of the elements that made the series great — but with a highly stylized, high-resolution look that could not have been accomplished before." From what I've seen, truer words were never spoken.

One thing that players will discover are the high-resolution graphics used throughout the game — not only in this series, but in every other recent LucasArts adventure game. *Curse* enters the gaming fray lavishly dressed, adorned in sumptuous SVGA graphics for all of the interactive episodes as well as the cutscenes.

Curse, though, is much more than just a collection of pretty pictures and infectious one-liners. After all, what good is a witty punchline if it's read flatly, bereft of idiosyncratic quality? Let's not forget that LucasArts built a solid reputation in the industry by choosing appropriate voice actors. Who can forget the voice of Ben — the gravel-throated, Harley-riding tough guy of *Full Throttle*?

For *Curse*, the company has recorded over 8,000 lines of dialogue. While you may not recognize who's doing most of the voices, you'll be happy with the end result. "We prefer to have the voice be what drives the game's success, and not the name behind it," commented Ackley. Of course, nostalgia-minded players might pick out the voices of former TV stars Dave Madden (Ruben Kincaid on *The Partridge Family*), Gary Coleman (*Diff'rent Strokes*), or Alan Young (Wilbur on *Mr. Ed*, and currently Scrooge McDuck on *Ducktales*).

The interface utilized in *Curse* can best be described as a thoughtful blend of *Full Throttle* and *Sam & Max*. For instance, the familiar skull icon used in *Full Throttle* has been replaced with a more "buccaneer-like" pirate icon. What's more, players will have the opportunity to pick, from among several choices listed in the message queue, what to say when Guybrush meets other characters. Many of the puzzles require the player to ask specific questions of other characters, in order to obtain information that will help them solve it.

Full Throttle, although universally viewed as a terrific game, was still criticized for being far too short. *Curse*, on the other hand, will be shipping on two CDs. From what we've gathered, it'll contain as much depth and gameplay as *Monkey Island 2*.

Aside from the aforementioned glitz and polish, *Curse* was developed with nonlinear gameplay in mind, so that the player can either attempt to solve a puzzle or refrain from noodling with it, in any order they choose. The playing area is immense: If a player gets stuck in one particular spot, he or she can visit another area, take care of those puzzles, then come back to that particular stumper later.

I have little doubt that this is going to be the adventure game of the year — and probably the year to come.

Give in to the Dark Forces....

The Curse of Monkey Island isn't the only sequel that LucasArts is hard at work on. With the phenomenal success of *Dark Forces*, it's only natural that there be a sequel. But unlike other first-person action sequels that are little more than new maps and maybe the occasional new enemy, *Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II* promises many new enhancements in the continuing adventures of Kyle Katarn.

Co-project leader Justin Chin noted, "In addition, we've incorporated cinematic live-action cutscenes, and the ability for players to use lightsabers and the Force, making this a truly exceptional *Star Wars* experience."

You read that right — gamers will get to use their lightsaber when battling against the evil Empire. But your Jedi Knight lightsaber is far more than just a glowing ax. The game lets you swing the lightsaber according to the best method of disposing of an immediate threat. You can also use it to defend yourself from enemy fire. As part of the cross-genre, role-playing element of the story, your defensive skills with a lightsaber start out pretty poor, but gather steam as you get more experienced.

Another unique aspect of *Jedi Knight* is that, instead of just fighting for the Rebel Alliance, you'll have to choose what side you'll ultimately end up fighting on. While you start out on a quest to stop seven Dark Jedi from unlocking the powers of a hidden Jedi burial ground, you'll come to a point where you must decide which side you're on. The Dark side promises enormous power, but a life

1. He may not look intimidating, but Guybrush has foiled LeChuck's grand plans twice before.
2. It's understandable why LeChuck has to take Elaine by force to be his bride.
3. In *Curse*, both you and LeChuck fight for the affections of the beautiful Elaine Marley.

of evil; if you fight for the Light side, you'll face an uphill battle.

It isn't in name only that you'll be playing for your side, either. Depending on which one you choose, you'll also have access to the abilities that come with that side of The Force. If you choose the Light side, you'll have the limited power of mind control (like Obi-Wan Kenobi in the original movie — "These aren't the 'droids you're looking for"). If you side with the Dark, you can do that neck death grip, a personal fave of Darth himself. Your mastery of the Force is essential to successful completion of the game.

While the game will be a wonderful single player experience, you'll really feel The Force when locked head-to-head with real rebels. This feature, sorely missed in the first *Dark Forces*, allows up to eight players and three different modes of play. Thanks to this, *Jedi Knight* may yet shake *Quake* as king of the multiplayer mountain.

Rebellion Alliance

With spaceploitation games being the current flavor of the month, it's no wonder that LucasArts' next foray into the *Star Wars* universe will be with *Rebellion*, a real-time strategy game similar to *Masters Of Orion*.

Rebellion players are the strategic commander of all resources, planets and forces controlled either by the Galactic Empire or Rebel Alliance. To succeed, players must satisfy specific victory conditions. For instance, those fighting for the Empire must capture Luke Skywalker and Mon Mothma, and destroy Rebel headquarters. Players taking up the Rebel cause can win by capturing Darth Vader and the Emperor Palpatine, and overthrowing the Imperial Seat at Coruscant.

Like most games in this sub-genre, domination of the galaxy is the mantra of aspiring conquerors. The universe is divided into sectors and systems, whose size can be tailored from 100 to 200 systems for shorter or longer sessions. But there's more to it than merely sending a fleet to the closest planet and blasting the weaker population into submission.

Gameplay is broken down into strategic and tactical components. Mostly, you'll spend your time making strategic decisions about manufacturing, resource management and mission assignments. But when two opposing fleets meet over the same system, the tactical component of the game kicks in. Players can take ships that have been deployed, join them in "task forces" or "fighter squadrons", and assign them orders or targets.

Rebellion is also heavily character-driven. There are 55 characters taken from all over the *Star Wars* universe (books as well as movies). To win the game, a number of missions must be assigned to achieve specific goals, such as diplomatic or rescue missions. By assigning a character to a mission that complements his/her attributes, you increase your chances of success. For example, you'd probably want to send Mon Mothma on a diplomatic mission — but be aware that he may be captured.

Another element that makes this game different from other spaceploitation titles is that instead of being turn-based, it's real-time. "Events occur whether the player is ready or not," cautioned Cline. "There's no time to run and make a sandwich, because you're liable to come back and find you've lost a planet."

With *Rebellion*, gamers will finally have a chance to step into some Rebel Alliance boots and attempt to do what only George Lucas himself has accomplished to this point: have utter and absolute control of the *Star Wars* universe.

Last year saw little action from LucasArts. This year, though, it looks like computer retail shelves, as well as the smart gamer's hard drive, will be bursting with more brilliant games from one of the best in the industry. CGE

1. If you've played games like *MOO2*, you'll feel at home with the interface.
2. *Rebellion* promises to boast very nice graphics indeed.
3. In *Rebellion*, there are 55 *Star Wars* characters to work with....

A SHIFT IN PERCEPTION

A First Look at *Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny*

IF YOU'RE A FAN OF CRPGS, then you know about Westwood Studio's *Lands of Lore: The Throne of Chaos* (*ToC*). Released back in 1994, *ToC* was justly praised for its beautiful artwork, plot- and character-advancing dialogue spoken by professional voice actors (including *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s Patrick Stewart), and three-dimensional first-person action sequences. While some gamers felt the first-person combat scenes were too reminiscent of shoot-'em-ups like *DOOM*, and early releases of the game were buggy, *ToC* was well-received by CRPG players on the whole.

by Tim Liebe

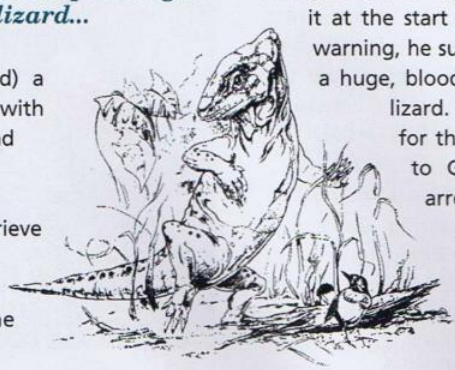
Given this, it was natural to expect Westwood to follow up quickly with a sequel. To everyone's surprise, though, *Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny* (*GoD*) has taken more than three years to materialize. Currently slated for a late Summer/early Fall 1997 shipping date, Westwood was kind enough to give *CGE* a sneak peek at some of *GoD*'s code.

Was it worth the wait? From what we've seen, I'd definitely say so. *GoD* — taking advantage of improvements in PC technology — features breathtaking 256-color full-screen, full-motion live video seamlessly integrated with 3D animation, and a high-resolution, polygon-based engine specifically designed for the game. The game, like its predecessor, has name actors like Clancy Brown (*Buckaroo Banzai*, *Highlander*), Julie Newmar (Catwoman in the Sixties *Batman* TV series), and Vincent Schiavelli (*Ghost*, *Batman Returns*) performing dialogue. There's also an evocative musical score by New Age composer/musician David Arkenstone and Westwood's own award-winning composer Frank Klepacki.

NO "SPATULAS OF POWER" HERE!

All of this is very well and good, but it doesn't mean a thing if the story's weak. After all, how many times have you been seduced by a pretty-looking CRPG, only to be disappointed by its storyline? Once you've plunked down your money, you discover yet again that your character's either: (a) muscle-bound and slow-witted, (b) wizened but mageborn, (c) roguish yet good-hearted, or (d) a maternal Amazon with a buxom figure and the wardrobe of a medieval dominatrix. Ordered to retrieve "The Spatula of Power" by King Somebody or The Sorcerer Whozits, you find your character questing through mighty familiar-looking territory. You then solve a bunch of puzzles (that are a lot like every other game's puzzles) while battling evolutionary throwbacks with glowing eyes and bad teeth, monsters designed by throwing animal parts together any which way, and assorted other characters from RPG Central Casting.

Luther sometimes shapechanges into a lizard...



I'm pleased to say that one of *GoD*'s strongest points is its rich, complex story. Players of *ToC* will recognize some of the characters in this game, but not in the traditional RPG way in which they were originally presented. Few of the "good guy" characters are all good; most of the "bad guys" are given credible motives for their behavior. As you can see from the lengthy outline that follows, *GoD*'s backstory has the depth and characterization of a good fantasy novel.

GoD stars Luther, son of Scotia — the vindictive sorceress who had to be destroyed in the first game. In a normal sequel, he'd be trying to pick up where Mom left off. Here, though, he's the hero — a driven young man cursed with a power he can't control, hunted by mortal and immortal alike. Having left home well before the events of the first game, he has no idea of what his mother did or became.

When Scotia was killed at the end of *ToC*, she attempted to transmit the shapechanging power she drew from the Nether Mask to her son. Unfortunately, the transmission got garbled. Poor Luther can change shape, all right, but he can't control it at the start of the game. Without warning, he suddenly transforms into a huge, bloodthirsty beast or a tiny lizard. Hoping to find a cure for this affliction, he returns to Gladstone, only to be arrested by King Richard's soldiers for his mother's crimes.

When the game opens, the player as Luther finds himself in

Gladstone Keep's dungeon. When a guard torments him, he suddenly — and opportunely — transforms into the beast, overpowering the guard. Chased through the tunnels beneath Gladstone Keep, Luther attempts to escape while shifting uncontrollably between human, beast and lizard. If he succeeds, he'll head to the Draracle's caves, hoping that the horned, dragonlike seer can suggest a cure. Because he's no more inclined to give a straight answer now than he was in *ToC*, the Draracle simply directs Luther to the Southern Continent....

A preliminary sketch of The Draracle.

PAWNS

During the course of play, Luther discovers that he's a pawn in a very large, very old game. The shapechanging ability he unwillingly inherited isn't plain old everyday magic — it's one of the last bits of Ancient Magic left in his world. Used by the gods before they deserted the mortal plane, Ancient Magic is powerful stuff, the only thing that can raise the corpse of Belial, a very nasty god.

It seems that Belial, to amuse himself in the distant past, gave the Dracoids access to bits of Ancient Magic. Realizing they now had the biggest stick on the block, the Dracoids went to war against their neighbors, the catlike Hulines. This was a violation of the gods' policy of noninterference (rather like *Star Trek's* "Prime Directive"). The other gods' requests that Belial stop what he was doing, however, were stonewalled by the Nixon-like deity. Worse, the noninterference policy prevented the other gods from redressing the imbalance Belial created (a dilemma Trekkers will certainly understand!).

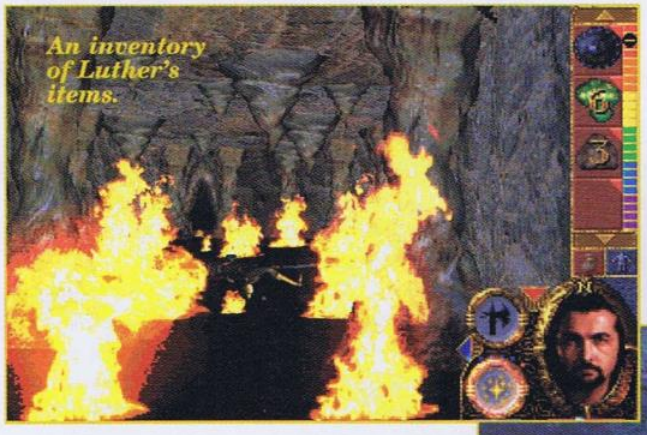
Eventually, though, the god Anu had seen enough. Fully realizing the consequences of what he was doing, he presented bits of Ancient Magic to the Hulines so they could fight back effectively. Anu's aid to the mortals finally prompted the other gods to action. They voted to order Belial's death — at the hands of Anu, because weren't they *both* in violation of the noninterference policy?

Anu slew Belial, but the wily god made provisions for his resurrection. Creating a monster known as the "Mother Beast," Belial gave it the ability to draw Ancient Magic from the air, and store it until there was enough to revive Belial. What he hadn't counted on, though, was the gods' decision to leave the mortal plane. No more gods meant no more Ancient Magic floating around to resurrect him.

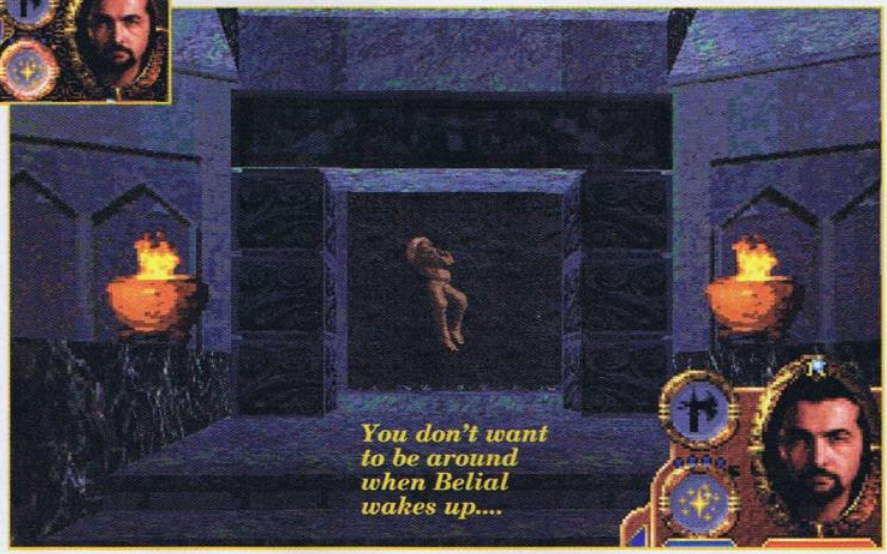
Anu, however, did not leave with the other gods. Taking the name "Draracle," he settled into the caves near Gladstone in order to keep an eye on Belial and his Mother Beast. There he kept busy by dispensing cryptic advice to the mortal races, aware that if he were straightforward he'd again be in violation of the noninterference policy. One day, he knew, some mortal would invoke what bits of Ancient Magic remained, and Belial would live again.

The catalyst that made Belial's revival possible, several thousand years later, was a woman named Margarithe Fiston. The one-time lover of then-Prince Richard of Gladstone, she was thrown over by him. She then married a minor country noble and bore him a son, Luther. She never got over being spurned by the heir apparent of Gladstone, however. When her husband was killed by a Dark Army raiding party, she blamed Richard for his death. Changing her name to "Scotia," she plunged into studies of magic, eventually siding with the Dark Army against Gladstone's king. Finally uncovering the Nether Mask, she used it in her personal battle against King Richard, not caring that in the process she might cause Belial's resurrection....

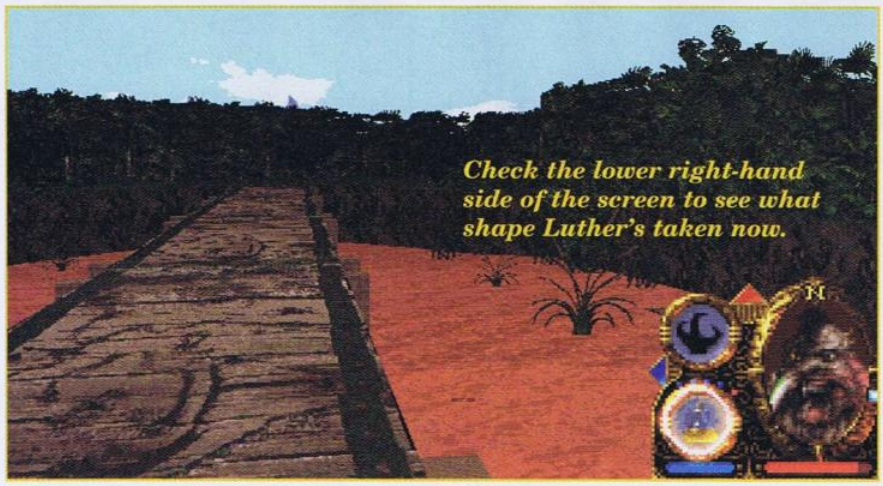
While Luther wants to rid himself of the shapechanging curse, he'd also like to stay alive afterwards. He'd gladly give up the Ancient Magic to be free of his uncontrolled changing — but it seems that the Mother Beast's agents can only get it by killing him! To add to his woes, Gladstone's



An inventory of Luther's items.



You don't want to be around when Belial wakes up....



Check the lower right-hand side of the screen to see what shape Luther's taken now.

Court Mage, Lady Dawn of the Talamari, also wants control of the Ancient Magic to prevent Belial's revival. At least at first, she is no more picky than the Mother Beast about how she gets it.

PLAYED-OUT?

Because we only saw part of the game, I can't comment at length about how it plays out. I *can* say that Westwood promises 20 different realms for Luther to search in. All will have the same stunningly beautiful 3D imagery that you see in these early screenshots.

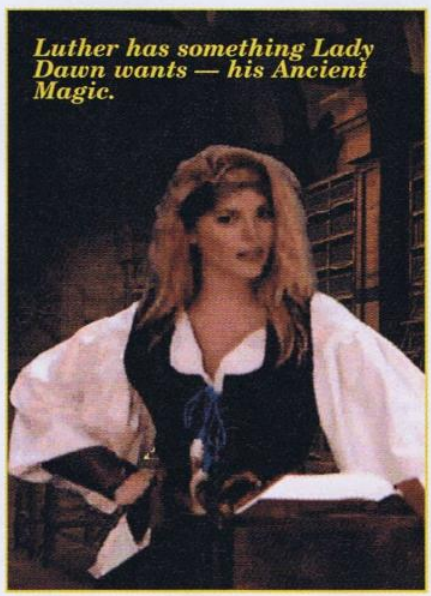
I was able to play three different realms in *GoD*: Gladstone's tunnels, the Draracle's caves and Museum, and the Huline settlement in the Southern Continent. As with *ToC*, I was able to interact with all of the characters and much of the surrounding environment. I could either gain information and items, or fight against the characters. Interaction, both friendly and otherwise, is mostly from a first-person perspective. If you're one of those people who felt *ToC* was "too *DOOM*-like," consider yourself advised.

Unlike *ToC*, *GoD* has only one player character, Luther. He starts the game with a balance of magic and combat skills, much like the Conrad character in *ToC*. Luther improves these skills as the game progresses, which includes gaining control of his shapechanging power.

Westwood felt that it would enhance playability to simply concentrate on one character, and to give that character preset abilities along with a preset "curse." While some gamers will be disappointed that they can't select from a number of characters, it would have been virtually impossible to tell the whole story from several different viewpoints. Seeing *GoD* from Luther's point of view, on the other hand, immerses the player at a far more personal level than does picking from one of a generic set of heroes.

The game will initially ship in a four-CD set, playable either under DOS or Windows 95. There are no definite plans for a DVD-ROM version at this point, although it is being considered. System requirements are an IBM-compatible 486/66 or better with 8 megs of RAM and 50 megs of available hard disk space, VGA/SVGA graphics capability, a 4x CD-ROM, MSCDEX 2.2 or higher, and a Microsoft-compatible mouse. System recommendations are a Pentium 90 with all the above, and a 16-bit or better sound card (preferably Sound Blaster-compatible). Westwood is including MMX support for the game. Because there's only one character, multiplayer support is not available.

Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny continues Westwood's tradition of intelligently-written, state of the art CRPGs. If you enjoyed *Lands of Lore: The Throne of Chaos*, you'll find the beautifully-rendered graphics and strong story an even bigger treat this time out. CGE



Luther has something Lady Dawn wants — his Ancient Magic.

SPECIAL EFFECTS PRIMER

As you can see from the screenshots, *GoD* has what appear to be live actors interacting with 3D animation. Out of curiosity, we spoke with Rick "Coco" Gush, one of the producers of the game, to find out how they pulled it off.

"In a lot of cases, the actors aren't actors at all," he told us. "For instance, the Gladstone guards at the start of the game are a combination of live actors and 3D animation, because that gives us more flexibility in their movements. Most of the monsters are completely animated effects.

"Most of the Hulines, though, including Julie Newmar who plays Kit'yara, are live actors in makeup throughout. Lady Dawn is also a real actress — her name's Paige Rowland."

To shoot the live action sequences, Westwood used their on-premises studio. "We've got a large greenscreen room, and we're very proud of it," Coco said. "We could easily videotape an elephant in here. We shot just about all our live footage in greenscreen."

For those of you who don't watch *Movie Magic* on the Discovery Channel, greenscreen is one form of a process called "chromakeying." Provided your actors are in front of a wall painted a pure shade of green, it's a fairly easy matter to make the green background transparent, so that anything you want can be put in its place ("compositing"). It's the same technology they use to put the weathermap behind the meteorologist on the news.

Unlike television and the movies, though, the compositing on *GoD* is done through the game's engine rather than in video postproduction. In this fashion, Westwood can ensure that the action moves smoothly, which is frequently not the case with full-motion video games.

Lady Dawn, played by Paige Rowland.

Kit'yara the Huline, played by Julie Newmar.

Raising Kain

by Bill Holmes

A First Look at Blood Omen: The Legacy of Kain

Just when you thought it was safe to go out at night, it's time to look over your shoulder. *Blood Omen: The Legacy of Kain*, Activision's PlayStation hit, has been converted to the PC platform for release this Summer. If you're into revenge, prepare to spend quite a few nights cutting a swath through Kain's world of the damned.

What kind of mind would create a dark, dense atmosphere where the central character seemingly looks out only for himself, sucks the blood out of his victims, and wanders from place to place seeking to satisfy his primal urges? While designer Andy Trapani's resume features sports titles (think of the irony *there* for a moment), he has a lifetime of gaming experience and intuition behind him. He has poured all of that into this mammoth project. (I use the word "mammoth" literally — for sheer gameplay time, this is one of the largest RPGs on the market.)

CHEATING DEATH HAS ITS PRICE

In this epic tale of blood lust and revenge, the nobleman Kain is brutally attacked and killed in an ambush outside a tavern. Necromancer Mortanius, the most powerful wizard in Nosgoth, revives him from the dead...but at a price.

RIGHT: Like Kain himself, you've made the deal and now must live with the consequences. LEFT: The world of* Blood Omen *is massive.

Mortanius plays upon Kain's anger and (ironic) thirst for revenge by resurrecting him as a vampire.

At first, Kain is single-handedly focused on finding and destroying the cowards who attacked him. To accomplish this, he is sent back to the dangerous world of Nosgoth. There he must journey to the furthest reaches of the land in search of powers, secrets and spells to aid him in his quest. Unfortunately for his enemies, as well as the innocents of the land, Kain also must sate his blood lust in order to survive. (You know what they say — breakfast without death is like a day without sunshine!)

We learn as the game progresses that Kain needs to deal with the increasing choke hold vampirism has upon him, if he hopes to somehow regain his soul. At first he can only survive by his sword and his wits, but as his powers increase and diversify, he is able to handle situations in different ways. The player must choose whether to fight or use magic, when to rest, and when to feed. Running on empty is not good for Kain; he is easy prey when weakened. If you're not careful about feeding Kain, you'll be back at that tavern in a state of *deja vu* before you can say "ouch".

Blood Omen is loaded with dozens upon dozens of enemies, hundreds of rooms, and over twenty-five minutes of full-motion 3D animation in support of the storyline. Not too much is given away at the beginning of the tale; your journey as the gamer mirrors Kain's uncertainty and discovery. Remember the credo that "nothing is free"; certainly you weren't resurrected on a dare. Pawn or savior, it's up to you to challenge the terrain and its gothic horror to complete your quest. Are you simply living the path that was set before you, or can you overturn fate?

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Like many deep games, *Blood Omen* combines features from different genres to avoid easy categorization. While by its nature it will appeal primarily to RPG fans, there is abundant action throughout — those bored by hours of "walking and trading" will also find the excitement they desire. The Gothic aura to the tale, coupled with the fact that its "hero" is a bloodthirsty killer, opens the portal to those with an eye for a storyline. Finally, the need to piece together information to gain the greater focus will appeal to adventure fans.

There's something in it for everyone, but the absolute necessity is time. The save and reload feature will keep your character in better health, but there are no quick fixes in *Blood Omen* — like Kain himself, you've made the deal and now must live with the consequences.

As the player progresses into the game, Kain discovers the ability to morph into different characters, each with special abilities. As a wolf, Kain is able to cover vast amounts of territory more quickly, as well as evade a dangerous situation. As a bat, he can roam the night sky searching for prey more quickly. As mist, Kain can slip through locked doors to access areas previously unavailable. The different rooms and lands have their own properties as well; sometimes egress can be accomplished by pushing a stone that looks like part of the wall. As with all adventures or RPGs, the key to the game is thorough exploration.

The labyriths, temples and paths in Blood Omen *are rendered with dynamic combinations of color and light.*

There are twenty different magic spells and powers which Kain can find and gather, which add to his power over his enemies in Nosgoth. Mind Control gives Kain psychic control over his human enemies until he dispatches them. Inspire Hate turns bands of attackers against one another. There are also special objects along the way that are for Kain's benefit, such as the Heart Of Darkness which allows Kain to resurrect himself and restore his health. Each discovery is accompanied by a voice-over explaining its purpose, and each can be stored away for later use. When should Kain use Flay (a powerful object that rips flesh from bone), as opposed to Putresce (which turns enemies into noxious, lethal puddles of slime that liquefy anything on contact)? Hee-hee...slip on that suit of armor, and find out for yourself.

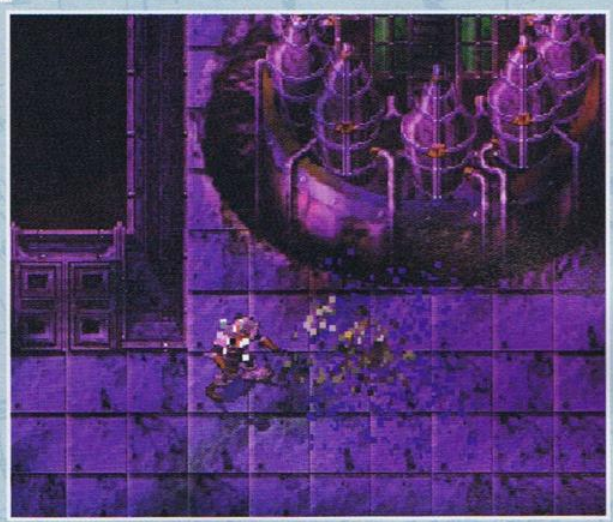
The player has a number of controls available at his fingertips to facilitate gameplay. Using a joystick for movement and action is a simple and intuitive method. Function keys allow the player to quickly summon spells or magic weapons, zoom in or out of areas, or even view a land map that illustrates which areas have been explored and which are still unknown. The ability to change shape on the fly is also a nice touch.

A FEAST FOR EYES AND EARS

Graphically, the player surveys and moves from an overhead view, which permits functionality while maintaining the element of surprise. Thanks to dense woods, catacomb passages and well-placed objects, desirable objects or dangerous traps can lie one step ahead. The world of *Blood Omen* is massive; while it will require some patience on the part of the user, it will reward those who delve deep into the game with hours and hours of areas to explore and pillage.

The many labyrinths, temples, paths and other screens in the game are rendered with dynamic combinations of color and light. Dark, damp recesses of the underground are realistically difficult to navigate, as they should be. Lightning casts eerie shadows, torches flicker, and moonlight reflects in an absorbing and realistic way. When Kain emerges from a mausoleum into the light of day, the brightness of the sun's glare takes a moment to get accustomed to.

For your ears, the ambient sounds build and support the dark mood of the story. Echoes of screams are heard wafting down halls, calling your attention like a siren's song. Weapons have appropriately intense sound effects — even the whoosh of a lance as it narrowly misses your brow. The CD-quality audio adds to the haunting mood as the player is drawn deeper into the game. In the preview, the voice-overs during the introductory scenes and some of the transitions were well done, and drew focus to some important parts of the plot.



SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS AND CONCLUSION

To run the game, users will need Windows 95 with 16 MB RAM, and a 100% DirectX-compatible VESA local bus or PCI video board with 1 MB RAM. A 100 MHz Pentium or higher is required, with a P200 recommended. The final version of the game will enable the user to switch video modes between 640x480 and 320x240-pixel resolutions. A Sound Blaster 16 or compatible audio card should do the trick for the sounds and music.

To say that *Blood Omen: The Legacy of Kain* is a violent game would be an understatement. Kain kills, mutilates, splatters and even filets his enemies as he makes his way across these lands in search of revenge. Blood flies and bones shatter, and gory scenes of bodies impaled upon spiked objects are the norm, not the exception. While the story line would probably not hook the youngest of users anyway, I suspect that *Blood Omen* would not be a healthy experience for the easily impressionable. For those who thrive on exploration, cunning and resourcefulness, however, expect to fill a season's worth of late nights combing the dark recesses of these worlds as you search for revenge...and the greater truth.

Walking the Gangplank

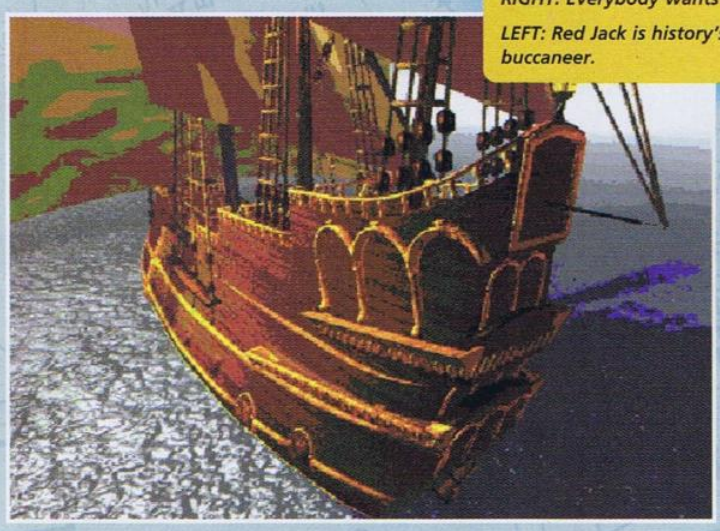
by Andy Backer

A First Look at Red Jack's Revenge

At one time or another, everybody has fancied him or herself a pirate, dwelling in the magical seafaring traditions and lore of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. My guess is that anyone who has read the novels, seen the films or visited Disneyland's *Pirates of the Caribbean* may have a sanitized view of life at sea; classifying pirates as heroic underdogs battling their enemies with cunning seamanship and derring-do, in a perilous quest to claim treasure rightfully theirs. While there have been scores of books and films about the squalid, immoral and cowardly lives pirates really tended to lead, they've never fully dispelled the myths and legends surrounding even the most villainous pirates. Centuries removed from fact, readers and gamers alike perhaps still see themselves as swashbuckling buccaneers, sailing the seven seas to accumulate fortune and fame.

Several years ago, Sid Meier's highly acclaimed *Pirates!* game represented a bold attempt to replicate the golden age of piracy. Several companies have followed suit; LucasArts' wildly successful *Monkey Island* series contained many funny references to the travails of a sea dog. CyberFlix — best known for *Titanic: Adventure Out of Time* — on the other hand, is hard at work drafting yet another animated adventure epic tentatively titled *Red Jack's Revenge*,which may shatter any lingering legends.

Red Jack's Revenge
Red Jack
RedJack was born in Ireland, and fought against the Spanish as a young man until he was captured at one point by Spaniards and forced to work as a galley slave. After the escape, Redjack devoted his life to revenge against Spaniards, killing them or stealing from them whenever possible. This is the point when he began to keep his journal, as a record of his exploits against the Spanish. He became famous all over the world as a captain; men clamored to join his crew. RedJack's greatest feat was going to be the theft of a whole years worth of Spanish treasure, a fortune of unbelievable proportions. He managed the theft, but was foiled by a rat in his beloved brotherhood. He and some of his men avoided capture but his treasure sank away from under him, and he was left to swim to the nearby island. He was injured and he died of fever and gangrene on September 17,1699. He inspired such loyalty and awe in his men that few of them doubted that he would have any trouble coming back from the dead, just as he promised. Surrounding himself with good, loyal men was his primary objective, and the fact that one of them was a traitor was more than enough to keep his



RIGHT: Everybody wants to be a pirate.

LEFT: Red Jack is history's most infamous buccaneer.

SHIVER ME TIMBERS

Although it's still several months away from release, by the looks of things it appears as if *Red Jack* may be the most evocative title of the bunch, faithfully adhering to historical evidence instead of romantic conjecture. In fact, *Red Jack* may be one of the darkest and least Disney-like pirate adventures yet to be conceived.

The plot is based upon the diabolical Red Jack, history's most infamous buccaneer, who was betrayed and then murdered sometime in the late seventeenth century. Drawing his pseudonym from his flowing red beard, Red Jack created a secret society known as the Brethren — of which Blackbeard, another pirate, was also a member — which was charged with protecting the buried treasure that *Red Jack* so dilligently amassed. Eerily, just prior to his passing, *Red Jack* announced to the world his intent to one day avenge his own demise.

The game's premise begins several years after Red Jack's death. Eighteen-year old Nicholas Dove, acting as the player's alter ego, lives a quiet life as a budding fishmonger in Lizard Point, England. As the story unfolds, we learn that Nicholas needs five dollars to pay the landlord, Wormius, rent on the family farm. He decides to pay by plying his trade. Eventually, he meets up with Shoeless Lyle, a pirate, patiently awaiting his shipmates at beachside. Nicholas moves on and, in time, catches what he deems to be five dollars worth of fish. He returns, pays down the rent, only to narrowly escape death at the hands of a Janissary assassin wielding a nasty sword.

Circumstances both physical and supernatural convince Nicholas to join the pirate crew and sail off to Jamaica. With the help of Shoeless Lyle, Nicholas eventually learns the ways of the pirate — including how to handle a cutlass.

At Port Royal, Jamaica, Nicholas stumbles upon a voodoo priestess who explains to him the supernatural reasons why he's come thus far. Events then take a turn for the worse. Nicholas is framed for murder and is subsequently sentenced to be hanged on the yardarm. He effects his escape by breaking out of jail, then heads off to the ruins of an insane asylum which has been

entombed by a cave-in. There he uncovers clues concerning the location of Red Jack's gold...and that's only the beginning.

Besides the aforementioned characters the cast includes Marquez, the most diabolical of villains, and Justice, who would like nothing better than to carve his name on Nick's chest. Many of the other dozen or so characters are intertwined in the various subplots coursing throughout the game.

RIGHT: Go to the beach where Shoeless Lyle waits for his mates.

BELOW: Sell this fish to the fishmonger.

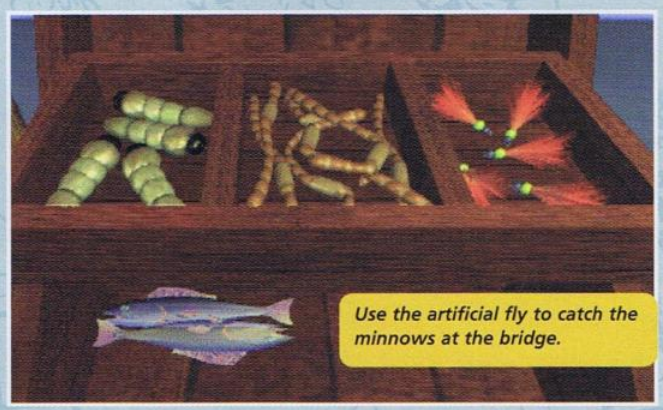
A FISH STORY?

Before Nick can become a pirate, he has to figure out a way to obtain five dollars in order to pay the rent. Assuming the role of Nick, the player starts off the game on the outskirts of the village. When s/he enters the village, Wormius will eventually stop the player and demand the rent. Although the village blacksmith and bartender provide snippets of information after being thoroughly questioned by the player, it's the master fishmonger who offers real assistance. He lends the player a fishing pole, suggesting that in order to pay the rent, the player must catch a big fish.The trick then is to troll in the proper sequence of events.

To solve the puzzle, Nick must bait the hook with an artificial lure from his tackle box, then cast his line off a nearby bridge. Eventually, the player reels in a minnow, departs for the wharf, then uses the small fish as bait to catch an even larger fish. The player repeats the process, eventually landing a still larger fish on the beach where Shoeless Lyle has been patiently waiting for his chums to arrive.

If the player begins fishing from the wharf instead of the bridge, s/he will only catch a series of inedible yellow minnows or soggy shoes. Talking to the other characters is indeed helpful. For instance, Lyle, the "fisherman's friend," suggests that changing locales may be wise. As puzzles go, this cat-and-mouse mystery is at first perplexing, but fairly easy to figure out. Nevertheless, it is story-driven, visually satisfying and fun to solve. We've been notified by the developer that every puzzle will be plot-based, although some will be much harder to decipher.

CyberFlix is upgrading DreamFactory, their authoring software, to be able to accommodate fluid 3D rendered cartoon animations, CD-quality sound, sophisticated sound effects, and even 32-bit color to the in-game graphics. DreamFactory represents developer Bill Appleton's unique proprietary software used to develop the virtual worlds, synthetic characters and intriguing animations that characterize CyberFlix's interactive titles. DreamFactory 5.0, therefore, will still be able to create a detailed artificial world, populated with distinct personalities, possessing artificial intelligence and memory-driven capabilities, while maintaining a rich story courtesy of an extraordinarily-simple interface.



Use the artificial fly to catch the minnows at the bridge.

"With *Titanic*, we aimed at expanding interactive story telling by creating characters with personality and memory," says Appleton. "They were part of a single coherent narrative that could be experienced in a variety of ways. And we built interesting environments that users could move through and explore with relatively few limitations. But to do all that...required some technical compromises, namely in our character animation. Now we've broken through that barrier as well."

Red Jack's animations are much smoother than those displayed in *Titanic*, which had employed digitized film segments of live actors. *Red Jack* eliminates any of the resulting jerkiness cinematography incurs by, instead, using hand-rendered cartoon animations. Each animated character exhibits fluid motion and a broad range of movements, gestures and facial expressions. The style is more akin to the type used in computer-generated animations, such as *Toy Story*, than any existing computer game.

CyberFlix has established a reputation for placing large letterbox-like panels below each speaking character's animated close-up to display the conversational tree. This facilitates play, since the player typically can more readily remember the various game-related details as they occur. Moreover, each character assumes a completely autonomous entity in the game, possessing unique personality traits, artificial intelligence and even memory. This becomes especially important, since key interactions and even conversations between various nonplayer characters may occur without the player being present!

In effect, the player must first gauge each character's personality, then respond in an appropriate manner based upon various narrative cues. Appleton likens this kind of storytelling to a "braided cord" — a narrative that moves within defined parameters but is composed of several underlying threaded themes, so that each player can experience the same story from a unique standpoint.

We queried the developer if any action sequences, such as ship-to-ship combat, would be included in the final release. They responded that sword fights would be the only action-oriented element the player would have to concern themselves with, although there would be at least one full-motion video segment portraying ship-to-ship combat. It appears, then, that *Red Jack* will end up as a well-balanced adventure game, combining narrative and character development, with puzzles and action-oriented sequences serving as extensions of both elements.

A TALL TALE INDEED

In *Red Jack's Revenge*, gamers will set sail on rough seas, fight hardened enemies, and no doubt journey to far-off places that exist in the dark, twisted world of pirate lore. CyberFlix's first fully animated 3D adventure seems destined to capture the spirit and essence of pirating as it was meant to be portrayed. CGE

From the Land that Time Forgot

by Steve Honeywell

A First Look at Forgotten Realms

The computer gaming business evolves in cyclic, uneven stages. Many of these cycles are predicated upon the success of certain games, e.g., a wildly popular title oftentimes spawns a rash of copycat or "me-too" products. Sometimes — as was the case with *DOOM* — a new subgenre emerges. Other times — as with *Myst* — gamers helplessly stand by as they witness yet another passing fad slipping into the pale horizon.

Lately, one particular genre seems to be silently standing by, mutely listening to the oft-taken role call. Gamers desperate for a new CRPG have had slim pickings over the last two years, with an occasional title, such as *Diablo*, to whet their appetite. In fact, *Diablo* and, possibly, *Daggerfall* are the only significant releases in the CRPG category since the release of *Arena* several years ago. For the die-hard CRPG fan, then, it's seemed as if computer fantasy role-playing was destined to go the way of the text adventure: a footnote in gaming, forgotten by all but the most dedicated consumer. Thankfully, Interplay hasn't overlooked the drove of gamers clamoring for a good, if overdue, adventure. Taking full advantage of the powerful *Forgotten Realms* license from TSR, Interplay has concocted a new role-playing game called, appropriately, *Forgotten Realms*.

RIGHT: As the players explore, they will be able to add new characters to the party to assist in their quest.

LEFT: Both interior and exterior areas will be fully interactive.

IS ANYONE SITTING HERE?

According to Chris Parker, the game's producer, the reason that CRPGs have been forsaken of late isn't due to a lack of gamer interest. In fact, as Parker notes, many of his co-workers at Interplay eagerly await the release of role-playing titles as much as any other genre. The problem, he cites, is that role-playing games are huge undertakings for the production company. Role-playing games are colossal, difficult endeavors, and it's tough to get every aspect of the game entirely correct. Many producers, therefore, are turned off by the incredibly complex logistics that games of the genre require.

Fortunately, this hasn't deterred the *Forgotten Realms* team. Parker comments that the team's vision is "[to build] what we think is the most awesome RPG ever." This, he states, involves a dynamic, ominous storyline that necessitates appropriating huge sections of the *Forgotten Realms* world — in this case, the Sword Coast. Gamers keenly interested in exploration will discover that *Forgotten Realms* has an incredibly huge area to investigate. The above-ground landscape covers over 3,500 screens illustrated in hi-res 640x480 resolution. Additionally, there are numerous underground and interior subregions to study. Overall, there is something on the magnitude of between 6,000 and 7,000 game screens, all fully and magnificently rendered.

Throughout this massive area, players will stumble into both random and predetermined encounters, turning combat into a fairly frequent occurrence. One of the problems with a map of this size is that moving from place to place can take a tremendous amount of time. To facilitate matters, players will automatically be able to jump from any place on the map to a place previously explored. The system computes the time it would ordinarily take to walk that distance. If a random encounter should occur somewhere along the trek, the system suspends movement, enjoining the party to make ready for combat at the point of contact.

Players craving more than a simple dungeon crawl haven't been ignored, either. While exploring and combat will continue to remain important elements, Parker and the team feel that political intrigue is equally significant. Geopolitical hassles permit the player to become embroiled in plots created by members of the various factions operating within the region.

While these are significant components, *Forgotten Realms* is being designed under the premise that a good back story must accompany the action, too. Rather than having to rely upon the traditional notion of "finding and slaying the evil wizard plaguing the once-peaceful land," the player and the party, instead, become slowly enmeshed in a series of genuinely intriguing plots and power struggles that take place along the Sword Coast. The goal, then, is to provide the player with an experience that — when finished — seems more akin to reading a truly compelling novella than another hack 'n slash game.

Novelization doesn't mean that *Forgotten Realms* will follow a linear approach to story-telling. Players will need to make real, hard-and-fast decisions, as they continue to analyze the trouble brewing along the Sword Coast. The party can consist of the player's character and up to five nonplayer characters (NPCs). There are 24 of what Parker terms "active NPCs": nonplayer characters who are willing, at some point, to join up with the player's party to determine the source of the region's troubles. These NPCs will be genuine characters in the sense that they may belong to various factions that have reasons to dislike — even attack — other members of your party. Picking and choosing which characters should be enlisted becomes increasingly important as the player progresses. Dissension in the ranks could create an untenable situation if NPCs should decide to fight amongst themselves rather than the enemy at hand.

RIGHT: **Forgotten Realms** ***will feature vivid exterior areas.***

BELOW: Dynamic lighting makes this dungeon scene more realistic.

IMAGERY IN PROGRESS

High concepts and game art aren't arbitrarily arrived at. In the case of *Forgotten Realms*, assigned artists tasked to develop the look and feel of the individual areas are provided with templates or storyboards to begin their work. The game will feature a number of basic building types that will be more or less generic on the inside. However, this "generic nature" doesn't necessarily mean that the environment won't be rich.

According to Parker, the underlying engine is perhaps the most important aspect of this or any other game. He cites *Diablo* and *Warcraft* as exemplars, pointing out their popularity stems, in part, from their relative ease of play. Like them, *Forgotten Realms* employs a real-time game engine. For the development team, this design standpoint raises some daunting issues. After all, combat in a role-playing game using multiple characters is considerably different from combat in real-time military simulations. In a military game, Parker notes, most of the units are doing basically the same thing, whereas in a role-playing game, characters are often engaged in very different activities. A thief may be trying to sneak around the enemy to attack from behind while a wizard casts spells; the cleric may be trying to turn a party of attacking zombies, while the fighters are wading into battle. The problem, then, is how does the game engine provide the player with an appropriate measure of control over all of the characters, while still maintaining a real-time combat perspective?

The solution is both simple and innovative. All of the characters in the player's party — including the main character — are configurable in terms of how they handle combat. One example, Parker cites, is that of a nonplayer dwarfed fighter. The player can modify the scripted nature of the character, perhaps changing him to a "crazy dwarf." Under certain circumstances, this berserker will charge into combat first and ask questions later. Players can also tweak the reactions of the NPCs. The demented dwarf we described can be ordered to remain passive under certain situations, e.g., when the encountered creature doesn't seem overly evil, or when the party has an opportunity to speak with the creature. Likewise, wizards can be predisposed to casting specific spells in given situations or to act in a particular manner, wholly dependent upon the encounter. A third, even deeper, level of scripting seems destined for inclusion, permitting the player virtually total control over the actions of the party's characters under any situation. At this level, Parker says, a wizard might be told, "If you encounter goblins, attack. If you encounter Orcs, attack. If you encounter trolls, cast 'Magic Missile.'" For the die-hard player, this level of control in combat is quite unheard of and, if pulled off properly, equally exciting.

Combat scripting will be available for the player character as well. In fact, the player's ability to script the actions of the main character will be far greater than those available to the other party members. Their reasoning is that the player will have access to all of that character's capabilities and options, whereas some NPCs may not allow the player access to certain traits. During combat, the player will directly control the actions of one of the characters, while the rest of the party follows their scripted path. At any time, the player can jump from character to character during combat, thereby permitting the player to adjust the character actions in accordance with new creature-determined guidelines.

Forgotten Realms is scheduled to be released sometime during the holiday season. The determining factor rests with the incredible amount of art planned for inclusion. BioWare, the game's developer, has created an extremely efficient system for creating and rendering the immense art library. Judging by their ambitious goals, let's hope nothing gets cut. CGE

Action Speaks Louder than Words

by Marc Dultz

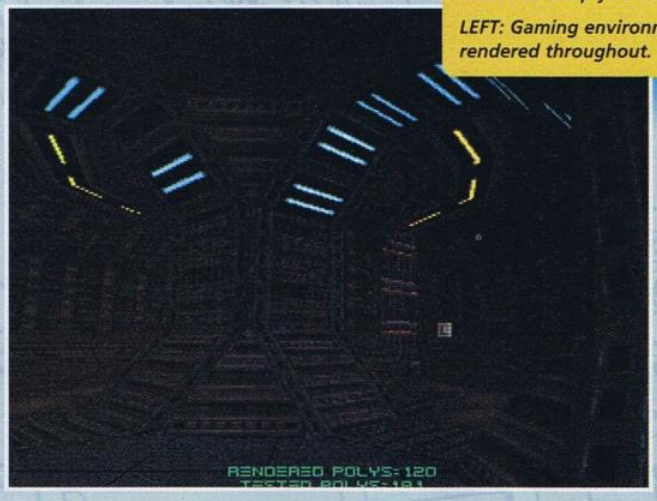
A First Look at Defiance

***De-fi-ance**, n. 1. A bold resistance to authority or force. 2. Open disregard; contempt. 3. In gaming parlance, what occurs when an irresistible force meets an immovable object.*

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED

For several years, Avalon Hill has undergone a slow, cautious transformation; methodically reshaping and gingerly repositioning the boardgame company to take advantage of the broader based and more lucrative computer gaming field. Several attempts have been made to broach (what has been for them) a vexing and indomitable market. For the most part, they have relied on a stable of boardgame-oriented developers, and a library of highly-competent but aging boardgame designs ported to the computer, to weather a fierce gaming storm. The strategy, while not producing the handsome dividends they had hoped to reap, has kept the corporate door wide open enough for Avalon Hill to remain a viable yet underachieving computer game maker.

Realizing that something had to be done to regain some of the momentum they had before computers overtook boardgames, Avalon Hill has shifted gears, betting a huge, and some might say risky, financial stake on a genre they have had little experience in. To cover their bets, the company's hired two "top guns": Mark Hall, eight-year veteran of Games Workshop, and now Vice President of Research and Design at AH; and Bill Levay, Director of Software Development at Logicware, best known for *Killing Time* (another action-packed slugger produced in league with Studio 3DO). Together, they have collaborated on a project that will hopefully reestablish the company as a dominant game manufacturer.



RIGHT: Lock up your target and fire away!

LEFT: Gaming environments are fully rendered throughout.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Like its name suggests, *Defiance* represents a brave new outlook, not only for action gamers but particularly for Avalon Hill. Marketed under their all-new "Visceral Productions" spin-off label, purportedly in order to divorce themselves of any criticism that might ensue from their strategy-oriented supporters, *Defiance* can best be termed as a cross between *Dark Forces*, *Cyberia* and *Descent*. Merging a rich, expansive storyline, a thrilling tempo and the wondrous machinations of an intergalactic complex under siege, *Defiance* marries the intense action-oriented elements ordinarily associated with first-person shooters with a compelling, plot-driven science fiction narrative.

To begin, our story is set on a remote world deep in the bowels of a Terran military research facility. Senior military command has greenlighted several experimental projects, hoping that they will one day enter service with their beleaguered armed forces. While several less remarkable designs are under development, it appears that work has also been progressing on the creation of even more advanced weaponry.

Our protagonist has been detached from a nearby military unit, tasked by the upper echelon to oversee testing of the new LAV-6 Low-Altitude Assault Vehicle under consideration by the military. A powerful ground effects vehicle designed along the lines of a one-man mini-gunship, the fully armed craft sits idle and awaits its inaugural tryout. During testing, however, the facility

falls prey to an enemy attack, and is quickly and mercilessly overrun.

The enemy, as we soon discover, is a race of cyberorganic creatures bent on conquering and enslaving humanity. These creatures are as insidious of mind as they are of composition, combining the destructive capabilities of synthetic bio-engineering with the more adaptable characteristics associated with more fragile organic lifeforms. Realizing you're alone, outnumbered and obviously outgunned, you must nevertheless rescue a handful of hidden scientists while simultaneously wresting control of the base from the enemy.

AN UPLIFTING EXPERIENCE

Gameplay is highly reminiscent of *Descent*; players fly their diminutive ship into and through a variety of narrow corridors, cathedral-sized sectors and huge, sometimes archaically constructed indoor and outdoor realms. All manner of terrain, obstacles and other objects — such as crates, rocky surfaces and domed enclosures — have been added, which heightens the overall experience as well as affecting gameplay. For instance, crates can, and sometimes must, be blown up by the player in order to reveal hidden objects or other essential material.

The player must negotiate a gauntlet of fixed and mobile enemy drones, as well as other robotically-controlled weaponry residing in and outside the installation. Moreover, the player will also be confronted with an assortment of alien creatures, all bent on preventing the player from recapturing the installation. Fortunately, help is at hand. Power-ups, missiles and other objects have been randomly scattered about each level, which do everything from restore health to restock depleted ammunition. Furthermore, the player is assisted by a rogue scientist that has avoided abduction and is hidden somewhere within the facility. His radio transmissions periodically interrupt play, and are intended to flesh out the evolving story, outline each level's goal, and supply a coherent basis with which to follow the unfolding events.

Although the action is fast and furious, sometimes occurring at breakneck speed, players won't encounter the same disorienting and dizzying effects that playing *Descent* often triggers. Avalon Hill's new TruFlow 3D game engine uses tweening technology to produce lag-free motion and dynamic visual effects. Additionally, the LAV-6, although a robust hovercraft, is incapable of executing loops or other exotic maneuvers.

In fact, piloting the ship may prove exasperating for some, since the craft requires lift generated by the rather smallish, on-board booster engines to ascend elevated areas and retrieve important items. The player must take heed when engaging the nimble craft's boosters, since lift can be rapidly, though never permanently, exhausted. To reattempt steep vertical climbs, the craft must either pass over any nearby fuel cells or wait until power to the boosters has been sufficiently restored. Players will discover, though, that their craft is far less responsive during these interim down periods, and may therefore have to first destroy every enemy unit in the immediate area before undertaking any difficult uphill maneuvers.

Like most first-person shooters, players have an awesome array of firepower at their disposal. The LAV-6 comes equipped with four types of cannons (plasma bolts, autocannons, railguns and scatter cannons), as well as four types of missiles (dumb, high explosive, tracking and swarm). In addition, four types of auxiliary weapons can be acquired through the course of play, including bounce bombs, electroshields, defense-based gunpods and even holographic decoys.

Expect to find all sorts of weapons in **Defiance.**

We were delighted to learn that gunfire has a persistent effect on the world. Terrain such as walls, doors and other barriers can be scarred by cannon fire, shell bursts or other explosive devices. In fact, fire a missile at a pool of water and more, objects aren't simply vaporized after being destroyed; instead, they explode into fragments, showering the immediate area with flaming debris.

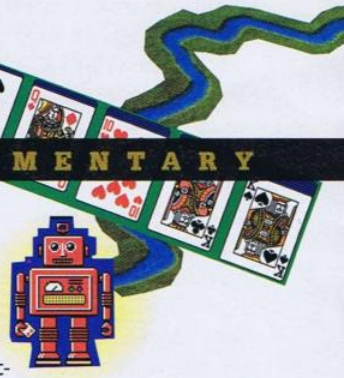
Defiance contains 13 increasingly difficult levels, each laid out in accordance with an open architectural design. So, although an assortment of intriguing puzzles and other devices will be in attendance, players needn't worry about addressing every single stumbling block to advance the story. From what we hear, *Defiance* will also ship with multiplayer capability, allowing up to eight players, connected via a LAN or through the Internet, a chance to duke it out for the title of supreme intergalactic leader.

DON'T MAKE ME KILL AGAIN

Based upon the early look we were afforded, *Defiance* seems destined to achieve noteworthy stature, not only on a gaming level but, more importantly, as a significant and perhaps defining moment for parent company Avalon Hill. Without a doubt, enough attention to detail has been lavished on the product to ignite a resurgence in first-person perspective action gaming. Of greater consequence, though, *Defiance* represents a meaningful first step for the publisher, who has to date been a somewhat reluctant player on the mainstream computer gaming stage. If AH delivers on everything they promise (and there's no reason to believe they won't), then the once-staid gaming house has indeed come of age, regaining the esteem and invaluable recognition they have so eargerly, yet patiently, sought to reclaim. CGE

From the Battlefield

WAR GAMING COMMENTARY



BY ROBERT MAYER

IT'S ONLY A GAME...OR IS IT?

Years ago, when I first became involved with personal computers, acquaintances ridiculed my interest in games. "Computers are serious business machines," they said, "not expensive *Pong* consoles!" Okay, while I'm dating myself, most sophisticated video games of that era were Atari 2600 systems. Same story when I bought my Commodore 64 and Atari 800 a few years later: toys! Even when I bought a Macintosh to supplement my aging PC (it was 1987, and my PC was a 1982 vintage machine) I took a lot of flak; folks back then didn't see much use in GUIs or mice, because real computer users reveled in DOS, Unix, VMS, or similar arcana. I fondly recall the reactions my friends had when I "wasted" money on Amigas and Atari STs. "Why do you waste your time with those things?" they would ask, perplexed by my purchase. "Silly Bob, computers are *SERIOUS BUSINESS MACHINES*!" And "serious," as we all know, means boring.

Well, times have changed, of course. Every Windows machine in the known universe comes loaded with a few games, and I'd wager Solitaire is the most popular Windows application ever devised. GUIs are ubiquitous, mice, trackballs, or pointing pads mandatory, and a new generation of computer users is surfacing that doesn't know a batch file from a baguette. And, lo and behold, even the doubters of yore have more or less made their accommodation with computer gaming. The curious thing, of course, is that the high-powered, sophisticated machines of today — the ones that figure prominently in dreams of increased productivity (whatever the hell that is) in business environments — owe their existence largely to, you guessed it, games. Face it: if all we did was run spreadsheets, databases, and word processing, would we really need Pentium 200 MMX machines? 3D accelerators? 32 MB or more of RAM or multi-gigabyte hard drives? Not likely. While the development of hardware depends on a multitude of factors, the push for better, faster, more realistic entertainment software has been the driving factor in the development of today's killer PCs.

Why? Well, I think it has to do with the nature of computer gaming. Look at the typical business program. It attempts to duplicate, and in some cases improve upon, a tried-and-true process. That process can be bookkeeping, inventory management, document production, whatever. The paradigm, however, remains the same or at least quite similar: the document of 1937, when printed out and presented to the sales staff, is functionally identical to that produced in 1997. Visicalc, 1-2-3, and Excel revolutionized financial record keeping, but only by simplifying, structuring, and enhancing existing concepts: If forced to, business could keep their books the old-fashioned way, with pencils, ledgers, and green eye shades. Databases, of course, offer relational searches, a host of data types, and a degree of interactivity that would probably be either impossible or impractical without computers. Yet at their root, they are the same as paper systems, only much faster and more flexible (though not, as anyone who has ever worked with large systems knows, necessarily more reliable!).

Thus, business software — the driving force behind the early PCs — works within a paradigm created long ago, and has, as its model, a set of concepts and perceptions that are based on fairly static, predictable goals and objectives. If you have an old word processing program, you can still write and produce documents that are 100% as functional as those produced on a more modern computer with modern software, assuming the output devices are similar in quality. Ditto with number crunching: an old copy of Visicalc will add, subtract, multiply, and divide as well as Excel in Win95, just not as fast or as prettily. Given this rather static environment, it shouldn't be surprising that the sort of hardware improvements inspired by the business world are incremental enhancements to the existing paradigm. More storage, faster processing, better-looking output—but all exist for the same purpose, the same reason. Discounting the occasional, perpetual hype about digital and paperless offices, the more things change the more they remain the same in the world of the gray flannel suit.

Enter games. What is the paradigm here? Life. Reality, or various perceptions of it, and all of their myriad variations. Where the business user seeks to replicate the typewriter (with bells and whistles), the gamer seeks to replicate the experience of drafting Rusty Wallace at Charlotte at 180 mph. Where the professional accountant uses a sophisticated version of the old adding machine, the gamer tries to get a missile lock on a jinking and dodging MiG over the Ukraine. And while the harried MIS manager frets with sorting thousands of personnel records, the gamers races frantically through a dungeon, pursued by the undead and legions of howling orcs.

Which environment do you think is harder to simulate? From the beginning, games were an important part of the vision for computers. Chess, of course, but also *Star Trek*, dungeon romps, strategy games — because the early computer designers had imagination, and sought outlets for it. As personal computers became available, users also sought outlets for their imaginations. From text-based games to Hercules monochrome, from CGA to EGA to VGA, users continually pushed hardware and software vendors to increase the computer's ability to provide free reign over their imaginations.

Think of it like this: you want to simulate flying a jet fighter. You need to perceive things the way a pilot does, see what he or she sees, hear what he or she hears. You want to make the same life or death decisions, depend on the same life or death reactions. In order to accomplish this the computer has to simulate a wide variety of sensory and intellectual events, then provide feedback. The drive for such realism has led to faster processors, graphics accelerators, sophisticated peripherals, massive storage, faster

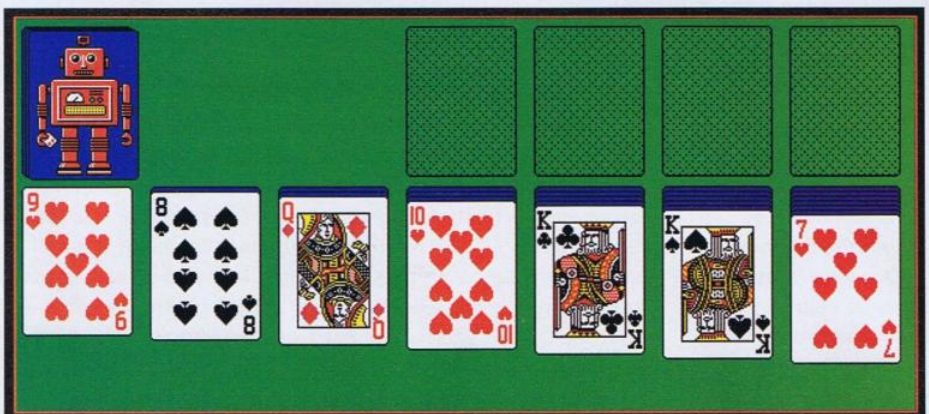
The drive for great games has given us this vista...

telecommunications — all because the purpose of game software is to simulate reality, not an ancient professional process.

Strategy and wargame players have participated in this push, too, though perhaps not so spectacularly as other sects. The desire to place ourselves in the roles of great decision makers of history, or to take on pivotal roles in imaginary universes, has pushed game designers towards ever more complex and sophisticated programs, and hardware designers towards, in particular, higher resolution displays, denser storage, and faster processors for that all-important computer intelligence to match wits against. Role-players — weaned on the rich literature of fantasy and alternative worlds — demand more and more fully realized worlds in which to play, with more evocative and effective graphics and sounds, and richer, more nuanced gameplay that simulates real-world dynamics in a fantasy setting.

All of this has evolved into a chaotic situation, where standards change monthly, incompatibilities are rampant, and confusion reigns supreme despite certain "Window"-washing efforts. Gamers are never satisfied: until the experience of flying a simulated jet, slaying a simulated dragon, or waging a simulated campaign reaches true virtual reality with holodeck-like levels of verisimilitude, there will always be something that can and eventually will be improved. Of course, those of us who also use our machines for more prosaic tasks can be thankful for the improved speed, capacity, and power of our machines, but let's give credit where credit is due. Without games, we might still be staring at green on black screens and thinking that 10 MB Bernoulli cartridges were the apex of storage capacity. Yet, as we have already seen, games and the promise of ever-increasing intensities of vicarious experience through software and hardware have contributed mightily to the complication of the computer world as well.

Is it a fair trade-off — IRQ conflicts, driver hassles, and upgrade woes — for the chance to conquer the world in *Civ II*, to battle hordes of evil orcs in *Warcraft II*, or to end *Diablo*'s reign of terror? Sure it is. Just ask yourself this question: would you rather be playing games on a Commodore 64 or an Apple II, or on a new Pentium or Power-Mac? While there is some truth to the claim that the biggest improvements in games over the last decade and a half have been the peripheral areas of graphics and sound, rather than in core gameplay, few would deny that playing good computer games today is generally more fun than playing good computer games ten years ago. And that's the name of the game, isn't it? Now, excuse me; I have to go track down the registry conflict that's been giving my machine indigestion, so I can take one more crack at *Diablo* before my e-mail turn of *Emperor of the Fading Suns* is due online.



...while without "silly" games we'd still be looking at *this.*

The Control Tower

BY ALAN C. FUSCO

Last month, I discussed the factors I believe go into defining a simulator. Briefly, I wrote that a simulation is predisposed to feigning some real event while educating the user regarding its characteristics. I then went into a lengthy discourse on just what qualified as a real event. While I believe that the last column gave a good working definition of a simulator, it was incomplete. Another aspect must also be discussed in order to define a simulation, namely, what proportion of "reality" must be captured before the game can truly be labeled a simulation?

This isn't a trivial question, nor is it easy to answer. As an example, let's discuss a few parameters that go into a typical flight simulator. What if a publisher decides to call *FlightXX* a simulator because it has the most accurate spin model ever devised, if the rest of the flight model is mediocre at best? Is this game a simulation? I think not, because there are other factors at work, but then where do we draw the line? Is accurately modeling spins and air bleed in turns acceptable? What about adding g-forces? How about lift and drag effects? In other words, exactly where does the simulation threshold lie, and how accurate do criteria for it have to be?

The flight model, however, is just one aspect of a flight simulator. What about avionics? What about weapon performance and accuracy? What about campaign modeling? If the flight model is mediocre but the avionics are 100% on-the-money, can the game be dubbed a simulation? If the campaign element of the game is poorly devised but the flight model is entirely accurate, is the game then a simulation?

Maybe some examples will help clarify these points. Microprose released three different games in their *F15 Strike Eagle* series. With each release, the flight model improved, but the campaign element continued to suffer. It held to what was then the typical Microprose formula: "Destroy primary target, then destroy secondary target." I think that we can safely say that the flight model for *F15 Strike Eagle III* was one of the more accurate ones of its time, but the mission generator was several shades below optimal performance. So do we demote the game from simulator status because of the poor mission/campaign generation?

How about Domark's *AV-8B Super Harrier*. In my opinion, this was a vastly underrated game. The flight model was reasonable and the campaign model was superb. Outside of *Falcon 3.0*, this game really provided some sense of involvement as I conquered each part of the island of Timor. I commanded the entire operation, selecting targets and strategies according to my plan instead of a predetermined computer generated plan. On the whole, the game made me feel like I really accomplished something. The AI and avionics in *Super Harrier*, however, were nothing to brag about. Since the game didn't credibly simulate a strong opponent or the complex avionics present in *Harrier*, is the game a poor simulation? Many indeed thought so!

Then how do we evaluate Spectrum Holobyte's *Tornado*? Another vastly underrated game, *Tornado* had an extremely credible flight model, one of the best mission planning capabilities of any simulation on the market, an accurate damage model, good avionics, above average AI, and an excellent weapons performance profile. Everything sounds perfect, doesn't it? Well, not quite. The graphics were poor, even for its day. So is *Tornado* then, not a simulation because it failed to accurately portray the graphical environment? Did the game fail to achieve stardom because it was too accurate, or because it couldn't replicate a mountain?

I think you can see where I 'm heading with this line of reasoning. There are a large number of parameters that help determine how to define a simulator, any one of which will garner complaints regarding its handling. This, appropriately, leads us to discuss another aspect of reality, i.e., what is "properly handled?" In other words, how accurate do the flight model, weapons model, avionics model, campaign model, etc., have to be in order to qualify as a simulator?

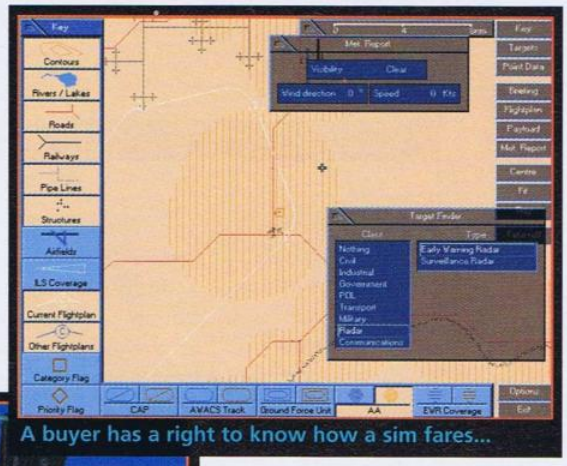
In the simulation community there is a lot of discussion circulating regarding the realism aspects of certain game-related flight models. There is a movement — at least online — to press for complete and total realism. I believe, or should I say I hope, that a rather vocal minority is advocating this. Unfortunately, it is a voice that is intently monitored by game designers. An enormous amount of energy is being poured into this one aspect of a flight simulator. Admittedly, this is an important topic, so why do I characterize this as "unfortunate?"

I believe that very few people really want a truly realistic flight simulator. Think about it for a minute. How many hours of training — both classroom and flight — does it take to mold a combat or, for that matter, a civilian — pilot? Do flight simulation enthusiasts really want to devote that amount of time to playing a game? Some may say yes (I guess they have way too much time on their hands), but most hobbyists just can't do it, even if they want to. Let's be frank — would most flight simulation fans even recognize where the flight model of their favorite simulator was somehow deficient? Often I read with amusement some of the online comments made by some supposedly "knowledgeable" person who has never even seen a Sopwith Camel, much less complain about the aircraft's turn rate. Yeah, like they know. Yet, whether we acknowledge it or not, these people unduly influence vast numbers of potential game buyers.

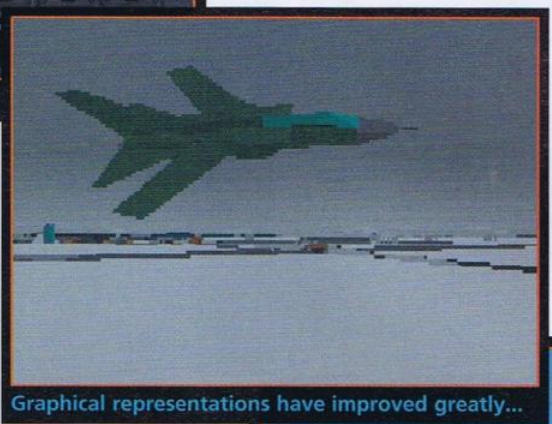
Let's say that a game publisher actually managed to come up with the ultimate flight model. Does the flight simulation now

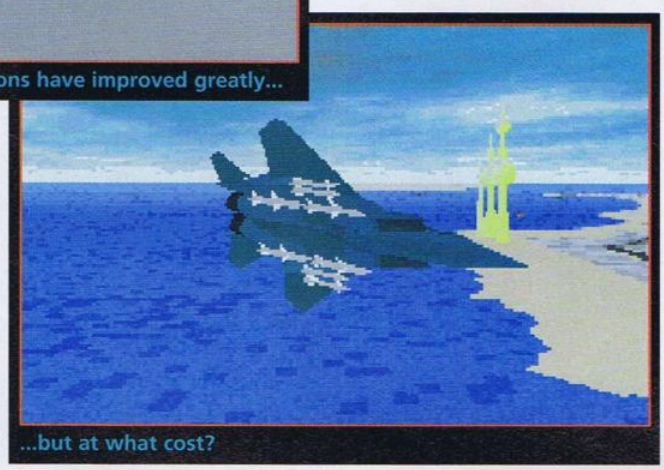
exhibit enough realism? As previously discussed, I honestly don't think so. What about graphics? What about situational awareness? What about the numerous data inputs that feed a pilot's senses such as sound, feel, 3D perspective and g-forces? Can these things be duplicated? Maybe someday, but today it's just not possible with the game hardware currently available.

Take a simple aspect like graphics. No doubt, graphical representations depicting the environment have improved greatly and this improvement has provided added play value, but at what cost? As noted earlier, I found *Tornado* to be an excellent simulator, even with its rather dated graphics. At least the frame rate was silky smooth. Then, of course, there are simulators that will even make a high-end P166 processor choke. What if a programmer dramatically improves the flight model of your favorite flight simulator? Personally, I don't think most enthusiasts will appreciate the mathematical complexity and processing power it takes to make even small incremental improvements in flight modeling. Taken together, these two important aspects will virtually cripple even the most powerful PC-based platform.


A buyer has a right to know how a sim fares...

...not just in its flight model.


Graphical representations have improved greatly...


...but at what cost?

Are you willing to pay the price for increased realism? Does the average fan have the financial resources to continue upgrading equipment with every new technological leap forward? Let's face it, there are very few people who can justify spending $3,000 or more a year on the latest and greatest equipment in order to play games. Should simulation developers and publishers realistically expect this?

I own a computer consulting company: even we and the vast majority of our clients still do not work with leading edge technology. It's just a financial impossibility to continually upgrade. We don't need the newest technology and I certainly am not going to buy it just to play a $50 game. But then, there are people who are so deeply immersed in the hobby that they go so far as to build workable cockpits and to buy high-end peripherals and pickup helmets from their local Army surplus stores. Personally, I don't know where these people find the time or energy (not to mention the understanding significant other) to engage in these types of activity, but what *I* consider sufficient obviously doesn't cut it with these gamers.

In my opinion, there are three primary factors which must be evaluated to determine realism: user preference or tolerance, how the publishers promote the simulator, and how the simulator measures up in predefined respects. The first is very subjective and will vary between cyber-pilots. The second is very concrete. If a publisher promotes the game as having an accurate, realistic flight model, it should be evaluated as such. By the same token, if a publisher declares a product to have the most accurate and realistic mission planner, the player may need to be more forgiving of possible flaws in the flight model. The final point is slightly more subjective, but vital nonetheless. The potential buyer has a right to know how a simulator fares on all counts, not just in its flight model. These counts include weapon modeling, squad management, campaign generation, AI, mission planning and graphics. There is actually a fourth parameter, and that is the computing horsepower available to the average enthusiast. This obviously affects what programmers can cram into their simulation, but isn't a factor that we as gamers can really do anything about.

How should we rate each of these areas, especially the subjective ones? Can we develop a rating system that is informative and simple enough that you don't need a Ph.D. to decipher it? I don't have space to discuss these issues, so you will have to wait until next month for me to flesh out my skeletal concept. In the meantime, let's hear from you. Remember I'd like this column to serve as a sounding board for *your* comments, not just mine. If you disagree with me, or would like to add your two cents, please e-mail me. You may contact me at afusco@msn.com or AFusco@aol.com.

Born to be Wild

BY SAMUEL BROWN BAKER, II

Lately the estate (asylum) has been afflicted by a pack of wild dogs of the software kind. Without naming names, some of the reviewable code looks worse than some of the alphas I've seen. On the other hand, there is *Need for Speed II* (*NFS2*) by Electronic Arts.

I FEEL THE NEED

While it's just a previewable version, it's far more polished than many of the finished products I've recently laid my hands on. *NFS2* continues the fine tradition started by *Need for Speed*, affording me and other downtrodden PC drivers a chance to let it all hang out, "crash and burn," if you will. While we might aspire to one day own a RX-7 or a 'Vette, *NFS2* goes straight for the gusto and provides six exotic cars that few of us will ever be lucky enough to slip into, much less drive. The new cars are the McLaren F1, Ford GT90, Lotus GT1 and Espirit V8, Italdesign's Cala concept car, Isilera Commendatore 112I, Ferrari's F50 and the Jaguar XJ220.

There are six new tracks to complement this stable of exotic automobiles. Each track has its own music and uses far-flung locales in Australia, Greece and Nepal (the most bizarre course I've seen) among others.

Unfortunately, thus far none of the cars from the previous incarnation have been ported over to *NFS2;* neither have the tracks. An arcade mode has been added — complete with power slides. Players can always choose to add traffic, if they wish (like choosing to have a toothache, but I do see the appeal). This version is Win95 only, so you DOS diehards can start groaning right about now.

The game supports Microsoft's Direct 3D and runs at a minimum of 16-bit color. Using 50% more polygons than its predecessor, the scenery whipping by the windshield is a more believable blur than before. (What, I'm going to stop and take pictures?) The different screens are well laid out and a number of graphic options are available to help solve any speed issues. The music sounds great, really helping to put players in the mood for a mad dash. Moreover, any controller already supported by Win95 is supported in *NFS2*.

Altogether *NFS2* offers us F1 wannabes more grist for our fantasies and improves on the good features already contained within the earlier game. In addition to slide shows and automobile data, video clips have been included. These portray the cars in action while providing some background on the companies producing these low silhouette beauties. Now if they'd just add an Eagle Talon turbo I'd be ever so happy.

I FEEL THE FORCE

In other news: If you're shopping for a mouse (I know I get controller fever every year and a half or so), pick up a Kensington Thinking Mouse. It has four buttons — mapped to anything you choose to select — with different settings available for each application running under Windows. In addition to the usual buttons for right and left clicking, I have a button for shift lock (a real boon for games such as *Diablo* which require the player hold down a mouse button in order to move) and double clicking. Any longtime Windows user knows how much trouble that alleviates. Players can also set up the two primary buttons as a chord which I've set as control-drag lock for copying files.

Ergonomically, if I had any idea how good this mouse feels, I'd have bought one years ago. It has an appealing velvet-like feel on its sides, which provides good gripping capability without hand fatigue. The dorsal surface is harder than the sides, with only the hint of smoothness: very pleasing, all around. All four buttons are located on the top of the mouse, for use with either hand. Since using this mouse, I've found that I'm able to play much longer before any wrist or finger soreness sets in. Therefore, we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all gamers are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; among these rights are lives,

Need for Speed II.

Pick from one of six exotic cars.

saved games and the pursuit of things to kill. (Nothing like badly paraphrasing a national treasure to make a point.)

I FEEL SICK

What has me so irritable these days is that companies continue to produce games that they expect us to play for extended periods of time. Never mind game crashes, kids interrupting us, wives (where did she go?) wanting something, sleep deprivation, loss of electrical power or any one of the other fifty-'leven things that get in the way of gaming. Obviously, these companies think their games are stunning creations that will never crash, keeping us spellbound even when playing an insurmountable level for the twentieth time. . . NOT! I don't expect to succeed instantly and play a mission through the very first time, but when I'm going through the same stuff for the twelfth time, I don't care what game it is, it still gets old.

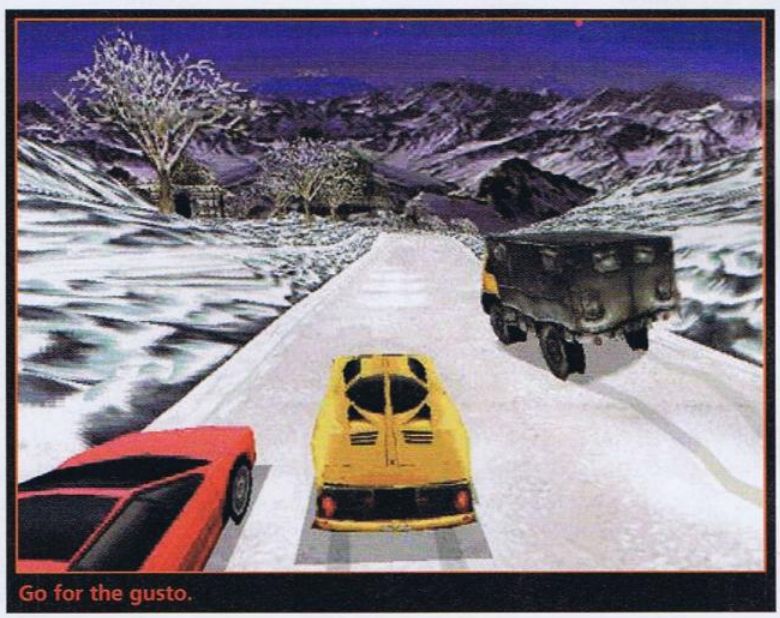
I know that "They" want us to have this "pure" experience unfettered by any safety net. The "They" I refer to are the Game Police. They aren't imaginary. The Game Police exist at certain companies, making sure us 3D heads aren't having *too* much fun. They certainly don't want us to have any *unregulated* fun. This lingering concept that you only have acceptable fun when playing in a certain way is completely counter to our chaotic natures. We want all the fun governed under State Law, Article Whatever. Heck, we want all the fun there is to be had! Forget about rules; we'll make our own. Our own levels, our own hacks. Want to see Barney eat a rocket? Sure! No problem! We hack *DOOM* until it gives up its secrets, and there he is in all his purple saccharine glory — BOOM!!!

Certainly it can add spice to the gaming experience when you're working without a net, but we can create that added dimension any time we want, simply by playing without saving. *We* should be able to choose just how far out on a limb we want to climb. I'm tired of having almost completed a level only to have the game crash, making me go through everything all over again. Do that to me too many times and I put that game on the shelf or take it back. If I say anything about it to other gamers, it won't be positive. If the Game Police were in Hollywood, I suppose we would only watch a movie from the beginning and have to watch it all the way through without taking a break — otherwise we'd have to start over from the beginning. Treat us as if we were adults able to make decisions for ourselves, and you'll have a lot more satisfied customers and fewer cranky grognards like me to contend with.

How would any of the Game Police like it if they were working on an important proposal, then found they couldn't turn off their computer or shut down the presentation software until they were done — even if it took several days to complete? Better yet, how would they like it if — due to periodic glitches or because somebody bumped their elbows or they had to leave the program to look up something — all of their work disappeared, leaving them to start over from scratch?

What would the Game Police do if they only had one shot at completing a project perfectly? Would they find all their information, enter all their formulas correctly, and have excellent eye-hand coordination while all this is going on? Wait a minute, this is beginning to sound like doing my taxes! That's sure a barrel of laughs, huh?

You'd think that, after the furor over *Dark Forces* not having an in-mission save capability, more software houses would have learned their lesson. We have plenty of sources of frustration and rules of work and at home, let alone the commute between them. Why turn our entertainment into yet another source of frustration?


Go for the gusto.

Action games should be a safe, controlled outlet for all those pent-up frustrations we submerge in our daily lives. Instead of going nuts and shooting the guy who cuts us off in traffic, we can load *Duke 3D* or *Crusader* and blow away a slough of pixilated villains, releasing all that emotion in a safe and Surgeon General approved way. Making us slog through levels again and again just because (or even if) we aren't 13 anymore and have perfect reflexes doesn't add to game play or value. It's just work. If we want to drop a quarter into the machine we can go to the arcades or buy a console machine. Heck, even my Playstation lets you save in some games.

Well, enough raving for now. Time to kill thangs. If you want to reach out and touch, you can get me at 72662.3066@compuserve.com. And remember: The Game Police never sleep, the Game Police never sleep. . . <cough>

The Gate Keeper

BY ANDY BACKER

CAN'T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?

I created a level one rogue and logged on to *Battle-net* hoping to find some kind soul to play *Diablo* with me. Next, I dialed up the service, glancing through the ongoing player messages flitting across the opening screen. Most asked for various level characters to join their parties, but no one wanted a *newbie*. Now, I'm not a proud sort, so I decided to beg instead. Looking over the list of games already in progress, I chose someone ceremoniously calling himself "Killer." A homicidal maniac, if only in his own twisted mind, "Killer" was a level one warrior and, as I assumed, could perhaps use a little asistance to help him live up to his *nom de guerre*. I joined his game — luckily he didn't use a password to lock me out — and met him in the town square.

I asked if I could join him. His retort was equally prophetic. "Sure," came the instantaneous reply. After we chatted a bit he added, "You want to kill something?"

"You betcha!" I answered.

"Follow me," he replied.

I tagged along, watching gleefully as he descended into a dungeon located below the church. I followed in earnest, scanning the ominous environs, eagerly looking for some monsters to kill. I vaguely remember what happened next. He walked up to my rogue, sword raised high in the air as if ready to strike down a mortal enemy. Whack! Sweet Mother-of-Pearl, *he hit me!*

Shocked, I watched in silence as Killer — true to his glorious name — mercilessly hacked my character into goblin stew. The screen glowed blood red, Killer's immortal last words hanging like a guillotine over my dead rogue.

"Follow me. Here's something for you... Now you die!"

I captured the screen and exited the game. I had read that there were player-killers — p-killers — on *Battle-net*. The 'net is filled with commentary about these demons, but little did I expect to run into such a toadstool just five minutes into the game! To his credit, he earned himself my character's ear. "What's that?" you say. "An ear?" Yep. When multiplayer characters are killed in *Diablo*, they leave behind a nifty souvenir one of their ears. Adria, the town witch, pays a dollar for the first ear you sell her, two for the second, and the price keeps going up as she collects more cyber-anatomy.

Many of the more mature gamers are evidently quite upset by the carnage, their messages filled with angry indignation and scorn. Some are quite extreme, claiming p-killers are the type of people who pull wings off flies, lobotomize baby frogs and drown newborn kittens for sheer fun. They wonder why Blizzard Entertainment even included such a bizarre feature. Most are equally offended that the "friendly" button doesn't protect their characters from attack by players who toggle their characters to aggressive mode. I told Rocky, a gal pal o' mine, about my insidious adventure with Killer and she was aghast. We happen to enjoy playing as a duo over the modem, but she claims she'd never connect to *Battle.net*, because she doesn't want to play with strangers. Especially strangers who might kill her character off at the first sign trouble!

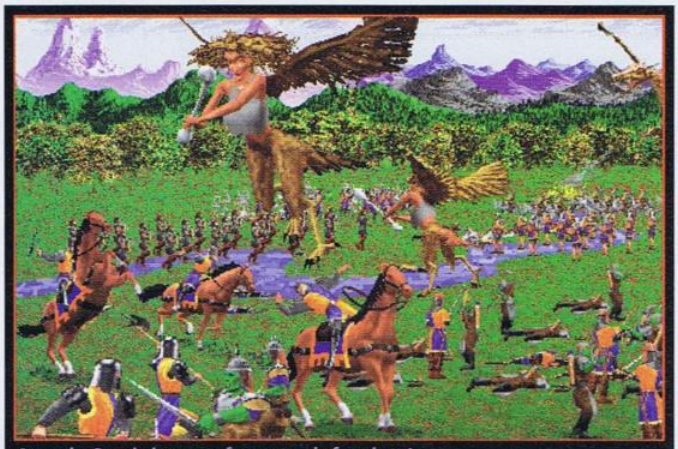
Annoyed, I wasn't quite as offended as Rocky was by the incident. I was shocked, but afterwards I couldn't help but laugh about it. Besides, multiplayer characters don't ever really die in *Diablo* unless they are *deleted*. After a so-called death, all of their stats, spells, half of their gold and the non-equipped items in their inventory are automatically saved.

Since that time, I've begun other online games with my rogue. She's been killed many more times by non-player characters (NPCs), but none of these deaths have prevented her from attaining experience level 30. Looking back, being hacked to death by a p-killer was nothing more than a wrong turn down the road to immortality.

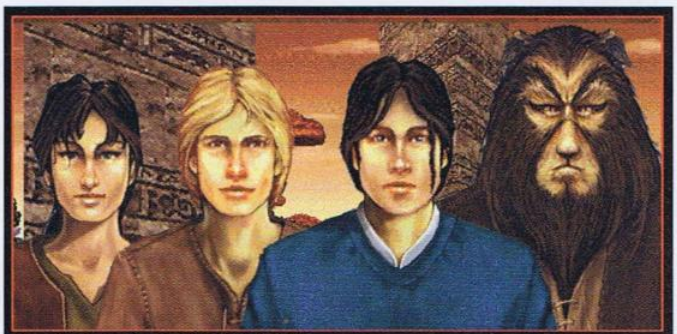
Diablo is the only multiplayer role-playing game I'm aware of that allows p-killers such a free hand. For example, while permitted in *Meridian 59*, p-killers names are emblazoned in red for all to see. Furthermore, any *Meridian* player is allowed to kill a p-killer without fear of being penalized. Still other games have options which enable players to keep p-killers off their backs. Usually heavily restricted, just about every multi-player game does permit the inclusion of p-killers. Why? Developers are keenly aware that some people prefer wearing black hats over white, enjoying being portrayed as the bad guy.

Outlaws delight in their trade and even offer advice on the 'net on how to p-kill most effectively. "Join a few games until you find the 'perfect' prey," one p-killer writes. "It's likely they will have some neat stuff you can steal. Be civil, but not too nice. Don't draw attention to yourself. Kill some monsters together for a while. Let them take half the gold. Give them a scroll of healing if they get hurt. Let them think you are helpful and then lead them to a hard level. Walk into a room full of tough monsters. Retreat and let the monsters surround your prey. Turn *player friendly* to *player attack*. Throw a few spells at them so it looks like you are aiming at the monsters and hit them by accident. Try and take away half their hit points and then quickly change to a firewall spell and block their escape route. Hear their death screams as you slay them!"

I guess Rodney King said it best; "Can't we all just get along?"



Angels & ministers of grace, defend us!



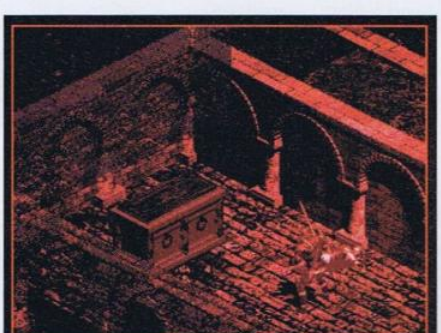
Characters from *Meridian 59*.

MULTIPLAYER DIABLO TIPS

In *Diablo*, it is possible to develop a player character for a multiplayer game without ever logging on or connecting with another player. The best way of achieving this — without tying up your phone line — is with the Direct Connect option. You don't have to be connected with another computer to use this feature. You can also use the Modem option and play alone, but anyone dialing your number will hear the modem hum when they connect.

Your characters can play the first few levels over and over, but eventually will stop receiving experience points. Still, they'll be able to collect whatever gold and items are in the game each time they start over. More gold and better items translate to stronger characters.

Once your character is at a high enough experience level, s/he can use the shortcuts in multiplayer mode (they only show up after you find them on their levels in single player mode). There are shortcuts between town and level five (Catacombs), town and level nine (Caves), and town and level thirteen (Hell). The shortcuts start at the town level at the beginning of a multiplayer game, but only level eight characters can enter the Catacombs. Only level thirteen characters can enter the Caves, and only level seventeen characters can go to Hell.



Diablo as played on battle.net.

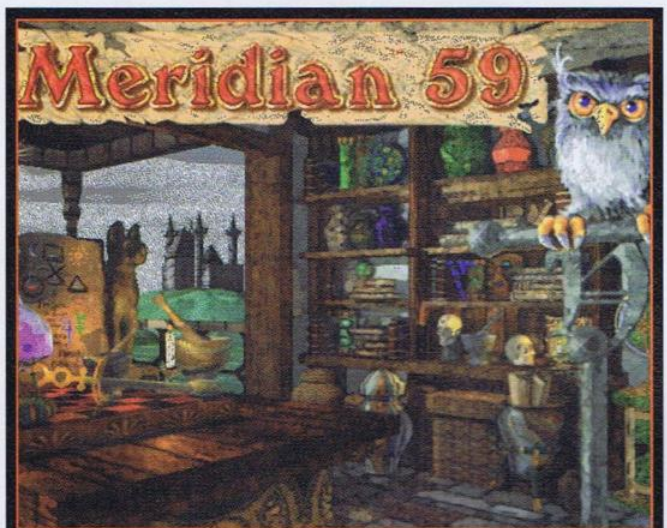
Player characters lose half of their gold and whatever items they were wielding or wearing; this includes amulets and rings. They even lose their armor and weapons. Don't worry, though, because much of the fun of playing in multiplayer mode is in returning and retrieving any lost items. If your character was traveling with a companion — via modem or in a party on *Battle.net* — just cry out that you've been killed and direct your rescuers to where your body lies. They can revive your character with a Resurrect spell (I always have my player character carry a scroll or two to use on other poor souls). If you are alone, just restart in Town — you won't lose any stats, remember — re-equip and arm yourself, then travel back to retrieve your items (they'll remain until you exit the game). I always leave extra equipment and all my gold in town before spelunking.

After characters have attained level twenty status, they can play — and shop — on Nightmare, the next level of game difficulty. Money is more readily available: about five to ten thousand in treasure and found items per level. The monsters are stronger, of course, but they can be handled by that level twenty character of yours. Be wary of tackling the Butcher and the Skeleton King, however; they are too tough for a sawbuck slayer. After characters reach level thirty status, they can play the final level of difficulty, Hell. Appropriately named, the monsters are monstrous foes.

THE FUTURE SO BRIGHT

We'll be running full previews and reviews, of course, but two Sierra role-playing games are causing us to lose lots of sleep in anticipation of their release. *Birthright* — the computer version of the newest fantasy world created for TSR's *AD&D* game series — may be one of the most exciting computer role-playing games to come along in years, if everything proceeds as planned. It will be a huge strategy game incorporating mega-battles as well as a role-playing element employing party vs. monsters brawls. Early code looks very promising. *Betrayal in Antara*, on the other hand, is loosely based on R. E. Feist's smash hit for Sierra, *Betrayal at Krondor*. Feist has now split from Sierra, continuing his Krondor tales for another software publisher. *Antara* introduces gamers to some new designers and writers who have forged an entirely new storyline, characters, and backgrounds. The game structure is similar to *Krondor*, divided into chapters, and heavily emphasizing story and character development. It's too early to make judgments, but what we've seen thus far is mouth-watering.

Comments? Write to AndyBacker@aol.com or 71202.3451@compuserve.com.

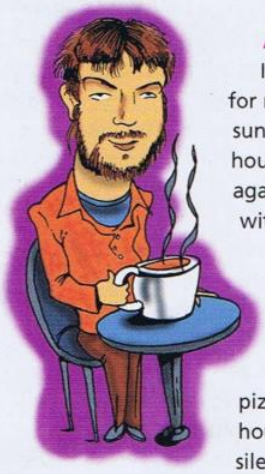


Meridian 59 main interface.

The Cyber Cafe

ONLINE GAMING COMMENTARY

BY TOM 'KC' BASHAM



AN ONLINE HISTORY LESSON

It was about 1000 hours Zulu time, which for me equates to about 0400 local time. The sun, which had sunk beneath the horizon hours ago, was preparing a new assault against darkness as part of its eternal battle with the ominous night.

On this evening, some 10 years ago, a small, Midwestern town appeared deserted, except for the 24-hour Standard gas station and a small light emitting from the back room of the local pizza shop. Somewhere behind the giant, hours-cold, pizza-producing ovens, another silent battle raged. The Nazis and Japanese were attempting to conquer Asia while Russia, Britain and the United States struggled to stem the invasion.

Two men, sitting across from one another, stared intently at a game board designed to accomodate five players. Neither of them had spoken for several hours, at least not since the last argument over a rulebook interpretation had threatened to expand into a world war. Both men yawned, neither able to walk away from the table. Ordinarily, they lived over 500 miles apart, managing only one or two gaming sessions per year. It could be months, if not years, before the two men would again meet on the field of battle.

Neither my friend Dave, who owned the pizzeria in question, nor I would end this game of *Axis & Allies,* at least while the war still raged. We battled on, long after the sun broke the horizon and climbed directly overhead.

Shortly after engineers began building computers, programmers started designing games to run on them. The benefits of computer-controlled opponents solved all the problems I just mentioned. First, nobody had to look farther than the computer to find willing and able opponents. Second, players could avoid the weary morning hours by saving the game and resuming at a more sensible time. Third, and possibly most importantly, time was never wasted on score keeping or arguing about rules. Right, wrong, or indifferent, the computer did the math and kept the game moving. Unfortunately, computer-controlled opponents often failed to provide much challenge. Deep Blue's recent chess victory over Garry Kasparov notwithstanding, the average computer's artificial intelligence couldn't beat the average human without cheating. Head-to-head play has proved only a partial solution, reintroducing the problem of finding willing opponents.

Enter the Internet. The miracle of the modem provides an ample supply of opponents around the clock and around the world. Each month, this column will look inside the world of multiplayer gaming, examining not only the gaming products but also the online communities being built around those products by dedicated players. In short, this column is dedicated to every armchair Patton, Rommel, Boyington, Richtofen, Caesar and Alexander that regularly lead their virtual armies onto the virtual battlefield.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

This month we examine an interesting aspect of online air combat: the historical recreation. Just as Civil War buffs don blue and gray uniforms and reenact key battles, *Air Warrior* and *Warbirds* pilots often recreate famous WWII aerial battles. Dubbed "scenarios," designers first use the game's existing features to create an overall framework which mimics a historical encounter. The scenario includes both orders of battle (specifying the quantity and type of aircraft available to each side) and event rules (specifying operational parameters for individual participants). Last April, I-Magic Online launched the *Solomons II* scenario, reenacting the famous World War II battle between the US and Japan in the South Pacific. Set early in the war, *Solomons II* pitted early-model A6M Zekes against US Navy F4F Wildcats, along with several bombers each side used during the conflict.

After establishing the event rules, the registration period began. Pilots signed up for various duties for both the US and the IJN, ranging from strategic planning posts to tactical battlefield roles, and on down to the pilot himself. Within the bounds established by the event rules, battle plans were laid and strategic strikes planned. Fighter sweeps, escorts and defensive Combat Air Patrols (CAPS) were established. Radio channels were allocated and an in-flight communications network was forged. The scenario itself spanned weeks, with sorties being flown at various times throughout the event. Registered players could rarely make all of the scheduled sorties, so "walk ons" often rounded out the squadrons.

In this particular scenario, Dave, the *Axis & Allies* opponent I mentioned earlier, assumed the role of the leader of the IJN CAP forces, while I flew several sorties under his command. Although designated as defensive CAP patrols, we wound up flying bomber escort missions.

ADIOS AMIGOS

The event began with a chaotic pre-flight, during which pilots scrambled to join the appropriate squadron, tune their radios, and obtain their orders. Both sides launched their forces, and the battle began in earnest.

The "event" arenas provide a different environment from the normal online ones. The telltale icons, which normally highlight a target 6,900 yards away and clearly identify the aircraft type at 3,000 yards, are "toned" down. Unlike the main arenas, *Warbirds* scenario pilots must maintain a realistic, constant vigil for enemy aircraft. The constant scan becomes tiresome, if not downright boring, during the long, slow flight in. Like their real world coun-

terparts, however, the sim jocks couldn't let their guard down for even a second. The US fighters could appear anywhere, at any time. We droned along at altitude, the throttles pulled back to conserve fuel.

Dave and I drifted off toward the right hand side of the loosely-assembled gaggle of Zekes. Our bombers were situated several thousand feet below, off to the left, and in an equally disorganized formation. The minutes slowly ticked by while we constantly scanned the sky for any sign of the enemy.

Suddenly, Dave called to our formation leader, "high dots along the right side." Turning my view to the right, I quickly confirmed Dave's sighting: a large group of aircraft, slightly above us, was heading right for our formation. Several seconds elapsed with no response from the leader. Again, Dave called out the warning, and again precious seconds passed without a response.

HOURS OF BOREDOM, SECONDS OF TERROR

Moments later, all hell broke loose. Dave, realizing we were sitting ducks, chose to turn his aircraft on a heading for the bandits. I quickly realized I had to remain with Dave, even though I spotted some Wildcats diving into the formation ahead of us. "Bandits inside the formation!" I called out over the radio, then broke hard toward Dave's aircaft. By now, Dave had already received serious airframe damage and was desperately trying to shake an F4F. Pushing my Zeke as fast it would go, I raced over to help. I pulled in behind the angry US fighter just seconds after it fired the fatal burst — only to helplessly watch as Dave's A6M Zero exploded.

Views from inside I-Magic Online's *Solomons II* scenario.

I managed to fire several rounds into the US aircraft, watching with glee as my rounds impacted the Wildcat's fuselage, only to break off my attack when another F4F dove in behind me. A brief turning battle offered several snapshot opportunities, and I eagerly dumped several more rounds into my opponent's plane. Wounded, he attempted to dive away. Quickly glancing around, it appeared that we had drifted off from the central air battle. Not noticing any other American fighters nearby, I dove after the fleeing F4F. I managed to score a few more hits before an unseen Wildcat whipped in and incinerated my fragile Zeke. Fortunately, both F4Fs that I had fired at ultimately died, and the *Warbirds* scoring mechanism attributed their deaths to me. Unfortunately, since I died first, these two kills weren't factored into my score. In the end, the US fighters cleaned house that day, decimating the IJN forces.

Although a little brief, overall the foray was quite exciting and entertaining. Not only did the scenario offer a break from the "standard" mode of *Warbirds* play, it also offered an insightful look into the reality of air combat. Any flight sim fan that's dreamed of soaring the skies with Boyington or Yeager must try their hand at an *Air Warrior II* or *Warbirds* scenario to get a sense of what World War II air combat was all about.

Running With the Bulls

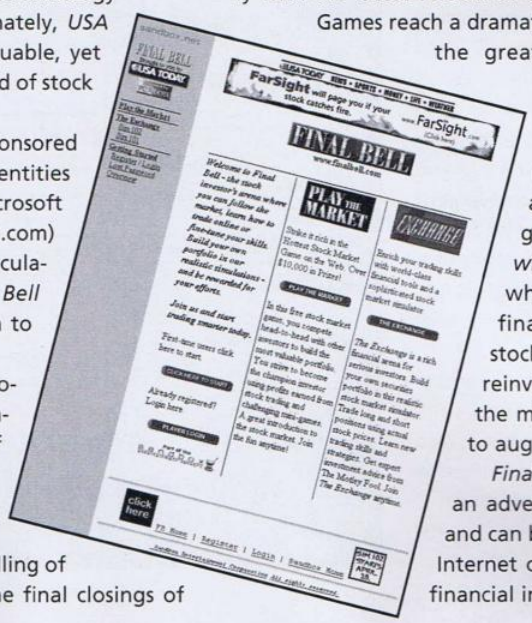
An Overview of Sandbox Entertainment's Final Bell

by Marc Dultz

MOST SMALL OR WOULD-BE INVESTORS view the stock market as a bewildering apparatus; rife with perplexing terminology and steeped in enigmatic mechanisms. Fortunately, *USA Today's Final Bell* steps in, providing an invaluable, yet easy-to-understand take on the confusing world of stock trading.

Created by Sandbox Entertainment and sponsored by a consortium of high-profile big business entities such as USA Today Online, e.Scwab, Intuit, Microsoft and PC Quote, *Final Bell* (http://www.finalbell.com) champions the aggressive if under-funded speculator. A Web-based stock simulation, *Final Bell* employs a simple to follow, stylized approach to investing in the market.

In *Play the Market*, a prize-oriented component of *Final Bell*, players compete in bimonthly competitions using $100,000 worth of "Market Bucks" (simulated money used to track each investor's portfolio). The object of the game is for each player to increase their overall net worth by shrewd purchasing and selling of issues. Stock performances are based upon the final closings of real-world stocks, although quotes may be updated incrementally with the latest version of the game expected sometime soon.



Games reach a dramatic climax; the investor that amasses the greatest simulated fortune ends up receiving a check — in legal tender — amounting to $10,000.

Cyber-investors, sometimes numbering over 13,000 strong, can also participate in any of four mini-games — *Pennywise*, *Sharks*, *Run with the Bulls* and *1929 is History* — which cover various facets of the financial world, such as Blue Chip stocks and mutual funds. Players can reinvest any dividends they accrue from the mini-games back into their portfolio to augment their original holdings.

Final Bell is free of charge, relying upon an advertising model to generate income, and can be accessed by anyone with a PC, an Internet connection, and the drive to attain financial independence.

The Kids Corner

CHILDREN'S GAMING COMMENTARY

BY JIM McCULLAUGH

Okay, your seven year-old is a whiz on the computer. You've weaned him or her on the likes of *Math Blaster, Reader Rabbit, Spellicopter* and other highly touted education titles. In addition, he or she regularly punishes most of the new game-oriented edutainment titles you regularly purchase.

But are you curious as to just how bright that little mind may be? If so, you may want to check out a new, and somewhat controversial, title called *The Children's IQ and Achievement Test* from Virtual Knowledge, a small CD-ROM publisher in Needham, Mass. They have come up with a series of three CD-ROMs aimed at Primary (Kindergarten to Grade 3), Intermediate (Grades 4 to 6) and Advanced (Grades 7 to 9) school children. Each retails for about $40, and comes with an 80-page parent-oriented manual which not only explains how to use the product, but gives parents significant information on children's aptitude and achievement testing. The company claims there is nothing quite like it on the market today.

Each of the titles has the look and feel of many current edutainment titles. They create a fun and relaxed game environment with eye-catching graphics, utilize fun-filled animated characters, and boast CD-quality audio effects and oral cues to guide kids along with easy-to-follow instructions. In this case the environment is Monster Mansion, where kids can veer off from a crazy room into a math computation subtest, or a capitalization and punctuation subtest.

At the heart of the programs, however, is a two-track intelligence test. There is an aptitude track which measures verbal analogies, listening vocabulary, symbolic reasoning, and figural analogies, along with an achievement track which measures reading vocabulary, paragraph comprehension, math computation, math problem solving, spelling, usage, capitalization/punctuation, science and social studies.

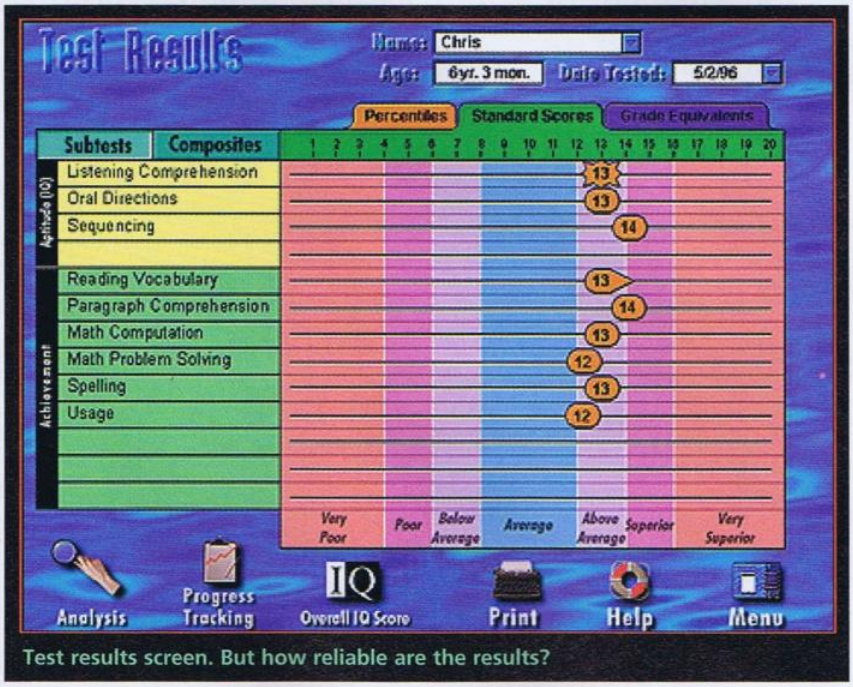
Not only does the program allow parents to gain significant insight into a child's abilities, all in the privacy of the home, but it also permits parents to track a child's progress by re-administering the test every six months. If they like, parents can even graph the results. According to Virtual Knowledge, the programs are based on a co-normed, validated paper/pencil aptitude and achievement battery. They were developed for the interactive CD-ROM environment by a company called Pro-Ed, a leading Austin, Texas-based company in the testing field.

Just how reliable are the results, and what kind of value do programs like these have? It's one thing to have an edutainment product which claims to teach kids in a gaming-centered context. IQ and many other kinds of national tests, according to many critics, have inherent social, cultural and economic biases, which may lead to some anomalies.

Company president David Blohm likes to think of his titles as "bridging the gap between home and school." He maintains that, "Parental involvement in a child's education has proven to increase learning and grades." The White House initiated a program, known as Goals 2000, which encourages direct, parental involvement as its prime objective.

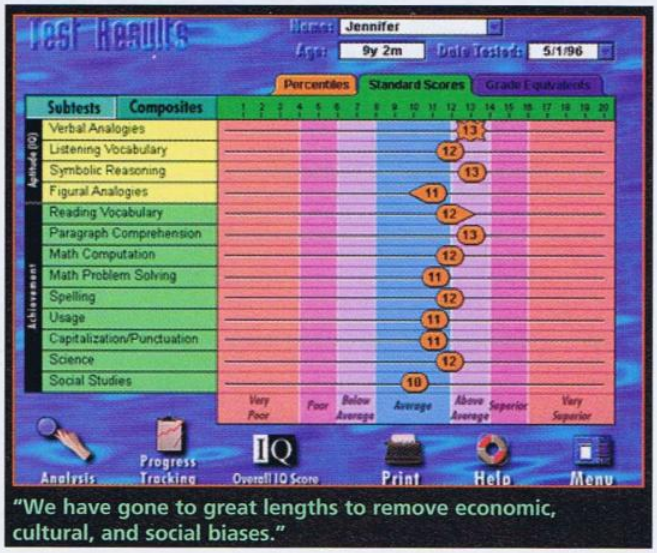
"Our title," he continues, "offers a great way to initiate active parental involvement. With it, parents can assess their children in the privacy of their own home without involving a third party and the resultant disruption and high cost. The parents and the computer administer the test. The results are delivered immediately by the computer to the parent. The parents have the control. With it, parents now have test scores which serve as a tool with which to work with the school and/or their child. The immediate availability of these test scores acts as a catalyst to promote parental involvement. We feel that the product is a great way for parents to get involved with their child's education in a very constructive way."

After completing the tests, the program offers eight pages of printed analysis, offering recommendations and specific details



Test results screen. But how reliable are the results?

Test your child's IQ at Monster Mansion!

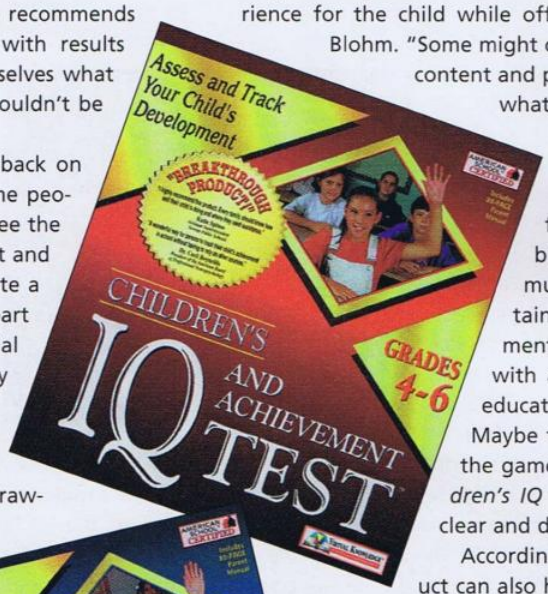


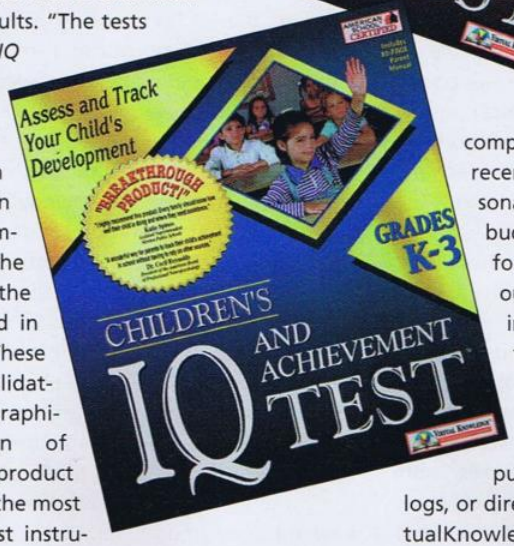
"We have gone to great lengths to remove economic, cultural, and social biases."

on test performance. This creates a great framework for parents and schools to start discussing how they can best maximize a child's educational experience. An important point parents should keep in mind is that the results offered should be considered as only one source of information. *The Children's IQ and Achievement Test* supplies valid results and feedback on the child, but is not intended to be the "be all and end all" of information about a child's development. Blohm recommends that the parents take the results, along with results obtained from school, and decide for themselves what stage the child is at, and what should or shouldn't be done.

Since its release, Blohm admits the feedback on the titles have been somewhat mixed. "Some people love it as soon as they hear about it or see the box," he says. "Some others have been upset and frightened that a company would dare create a product to test a child's IQ. The interesting part has been witnessing the people with initial fears and doubts change after they actually see the product."

Blohm also concedes that testing is a very controversial issue. People express a variety of opinions about the merits and drawbacks of testing and test results. "The tests contained in *The Children's IQ and Achievement Test,*" he adds "are not tests that we created off the top of our heads. All of the content in the programs comes from an established assessment company in Texas that creates the paper and pencil (fill in the bubbles) tests that are used in schools across the country. These particular tests have been validated over an extensive, demographically diverse population of students. The result is a product with norms that are among the most statistically valid for any test instrument of this kind. This means that the demographics mirror the US Census data, and that we have gone to great lengths to remove economic, cultural, and social biases from this line of products."





How are these titles different from the majority of other education and/or edutainment titles on the market today? "Some might classify it as edutainment because it represents a fun experience for the child while offering educational benefits," says Blohm. "Some might classify it as education because the content and practical value of this is far beyond what you experience in edutainment titles. We might call this a special purpose edutainment title. Our title offers a fun experience for the child (cute characters, etc.), but the content of the product is much different from standard edutainment products. Other edutainment titles that we are often grouped with are games or activities that offer educational benefits that are unclear. Maybe the kid will learn something from the games, and maybe not. With our *Children's IQ* titles, the benefits of testing are clear and direct."

According to Virtual Knowledge, the product can also help combat the erosion and overcrowding of many of today's school systems. The company even claims it received a letter from a family that recently moved to a new city. The child went from a reasonable school system to an overcrowded one. Due to budget cuts, the new school system had to combine the fourth and fifth graders. When the child's mother found out that the class contained over 100 students, she immediately purchased the product. Since she has little faith in the teacher's ability to adequately test each child, the mother now has a way of personally assessing and tracking her child's development.

The Children's IQ and Achievement Test may be purchased at retail stores, from computer software catalogs, or directly from the company at (800) 301-9545 or www.VirtualKnowledge.com.

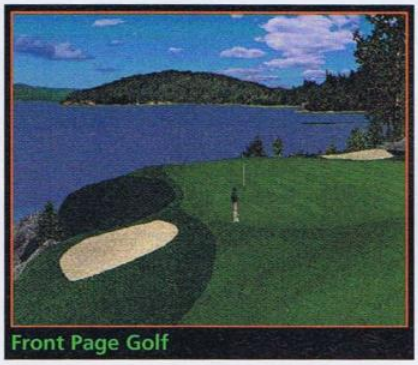
From The Pressbox

SPORTS GAMING COMMENTARY

BY BILL HOLMES

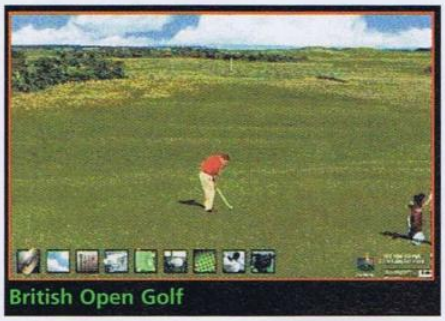
Welcome back to The Press Box, where our thoughts this month are focused on that tiny white ball with the dimpled surface. Although the climate in your part of the sphere may not be conducive to playing nine or eighteen holes at a moment's notice, the photo-realism of today's computer golfing sims may make it all just a moot matter. No longer will you need to worry about your choice of irons on a cold and rainy day. Those days of ending up as a human tuning fork are indeed over.

Access, a longtime leader in the computer golf simulation arena, has coasted with an admittedly great product. When Access released *Links LS* last year, it must have served as a wake-up call for the competition to start producing better golf sims. As they slowly close the gap on the leader, 1997 is shaping up to be one of the most exciting seasons yet for cyber-linksters. The funny thing is, by creating *Links LS* Access may have started a chain reaction. Now it is their turn to play catch-up.



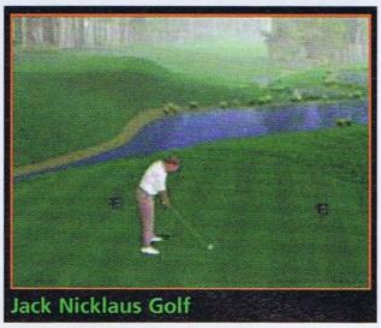
Front Page Golf

Thanks to new technology, the wait time associated with screen redraw rates has been reduced to virtually nil. Accolade, an occasional sleeping giant in the golfing field, has finally put the pedal to the metal with *Jack Nicklaus 4*. Not only is it a faster game than its predecessors, its graphic quality has finally risen to a level we can all feel comfortable with. The course design feature has, over the years, kept the *Jack Nicklaus* series alive. Now, thanks to some breathtaking visuals, this game may just be the stunner we've all been waiting for. There are thousands of unique freeware courses floating around at this time that can have their layouts upgraded to this new format (the objects must be re-created), so how can you possibly run out of courses to play? For the more adventurous types, designing new courses that don't look the least bit cartoonish is a real treat.



British Open Golf

Sierra has also jumped into this swelling market; *Front Page Sports Golf* wisely focuses on the swing interface, instead of butting heads with other products over who's got the best graphics. They still provide the standard three-click mouse-driven method of hitting a ball, where a pre-swing foot adjustment and aiming key combine to determine distance and direction. New, however, is the "TrueSwing" technology, where the movement of the mouse itself can determine the ball's trajectory. Although this method of ball control doesn't necessarily address the issue of manual dexterity, this option does add a new dimension to the game. The *Front Page Sports* team has always incorporated the physics of the game into their products, and has led the pack in this regard. If the public prefers this new feature, opting to go for it as they did with *Front Page Sports Football*, Sierra should climb alongside the proven leaders.



Jack Nicklaus Golf

No longer in coast mode, Access has *Links LS '98* on the way, featuring "look-ahead rendering" to eliminate sluggish screen redraw rates. In addition, look for an IPX network connection (accommodating up to eight players), with full DirectX support to be included. This should keep *Links* up to speed with everyone else. Besides new sounds, graphics and animated elements, camera angles have doubled to eight, and a digitized scorecard (that looks like the real thing) can be printed out with your score on it. We'll have to wait and see what system limitations exist, if any, to make this baby keep from humming like it should. Competition is good, eh?

I expect to see similar improvements to *PGA Tour* from EA Sports. I'm still impressed by how quickly they became a major player in this area. With the license to represent many of the touring pros, *PGA Tour* has become a favorite of many gamers. More courses and an expanded network tournament mode should make the newest version a keeper.

Likewise, *Microsoft Golf* will continue to hone its ability to host and run *ad hoc* competitions at its Website, while providing the standalone player with a rich and fulfilling golfing experience. Looking Glass Technology's *British Open Championship Golf*, although lacking network play, gives the gamer the best sense of participating in a true tournament. We'll keep a caddie's-eye view on these and other contenders as they spring up this year.

Remember, as long as you're risking your job and your business's computer network by playing a game, you might as well make it golf. At the very least, if you get called on the carpet by your boss, you can talk to someone who understands the game or challenge him to a "quick nine" to get your job back. Somehow challenging him to a "death match" in *DOOM* doesn't seem to have the same impact, y'know?

That's my story and I'm sticking to it. See you next issue!

Under The Hood

HARDWARE COMMENTARY

BY TIM LIEBE

In the past decade, Timothy Liebe has written about personal computing and consumer electronics for Windows Sources, Videomaker, Multimedia Producer, *New York Times Custom Publishing and* The Gist *Website (www.thegist.com). In addition to his position as Senior Editor of* CGE, *Tim is also currently a Senior Contributor to both* Video Magazine *and the "online magazine"* Hyperzine *(www.hyperzine.com).*

AS A COMPUTER GAME FAN, you've got problems the everyday PC consumer doesn't. While a home or office user can manage with a computer that's as much as five years old, system requirements on PC games keep rising. That Pentium 60 with eight megs of RAM might have been hot stuff when you bought it in 1995, but now it won't run half the games out there. You may also be confused about all the new widgets and gizmos advertised each month in computer gaming magazines. Worst of all, doesn't it often appear that every new piece of hardware or software conflicts with *something* on your PC?

These are the kinds of things I'm going to address in this space each month. I'll be talking about new computer hardware and technologies in detail, discussing ways to upgrade existing systems, and suggesting workarounds for common system conflicts. I'll also be reviewing computer hardware in future columns, so you'll have a more informed opinion than a superstore sales rep's.

I'd also like to hear from you. You may have come across a hardware problem and could use some help. Maybe you disagree with my assessment of something, or think I should have covered something that I haven't. Possibly you've *solved* a hardware problem, and would like to share it with the rest of us. It doesn't matter to me whether you're a newbie to PC gaming, hardcore gamer, or industry rep; write in. While I can't answer any letters personally, I'll address your concerns right here each month. Outright flames will be ignored, though, so be tactful!

I can be reached either via e-mail at "mail@cgentertainment.com", or by snail-mail at:

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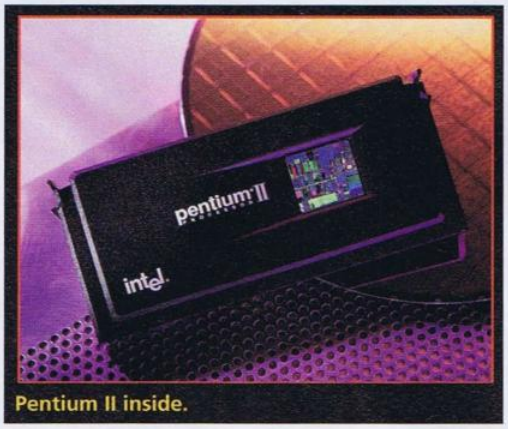
ATTENTION: Technical Editor

ON THE SCREAMING EDGE: PENTIUM II PROCESSORS

This has been a busy year for Intel. Back in January, they introduced the Pentium processor with MMX technology, which is designed to run media applications faster. Less than six months later, they've introduced a new generation of superprocessors: the Pentium II series.

With clock speeds of 233, 266 and 300 MHz, the Pentium IIs are faster than either classic Pentiums or their high-end Pentium Pro line. But processor speed alone can only improve performance so much, thanks to a bus architecture bottleneck inherent in classic Pentiums. At best, the system bus on a classic Pentium only allows data transfer at speeds of 66 MHz — and the data can only travel sequentially, one instruction at a time.

The Pentium Pros and Pentium IIs, on the other hand, use something called "Dual Independent Bus (DIB) architecture." These processors contains a second bus known as an "L2 cache bus": they run at half the processor speed on the Pentium IIs, and at the full processor speed on the high-end Pentium Pros. More importantly, the L2 cache can handle more than one instruction at a time, and the instructions need *not* be sequential. Best of all, unlike MMX technology, DIB architecture is not software dependent.



Pentium II inside.

Don't count MMX out yet, though, because the Pentium II includes that as well. MMX uses a feature called "Single Instruction Multiple Data" (SIMD), which can process more than one calculation at a time if the software tells it to. This design was incorporated because games and other media-heavy applications frequently spend much of their processor time on a relatively small piece of code, like a geometric or rastered graphic. Being able to send two, four or eight calculations at once on those pieces of code is how MMX-enabled software can speed up game graphics. Combine that with the L2 cache, and you're looking at a vast improvement in gaming speed and power!

You won't be able to simply replace your current classic Pentium chip with a Pentium II chip, however. It requires a motherboard specifically designed for it, which uses the same chipset and voltage as a Pentium Pro uses. Also, as you can see from the photo, it doesn't look a thing like any previous Intel chip. It isn't mounted with pins, for one thing. Instead, it uses a fairly large Single Edge Contact cartridge (5" w x 2-1/2" h x 1/2" d), which mounts into a "Slot 1" that looks a little like a PCI card slot.

At this time, most Pentium II PCs are built for businesses that require efficient 32-bit processing. Pentium II desktops optimized for gaming/home entertainment use, though, are expected later this year.

GENRE DIFFERENTIATION

While most games can be sorted into readily distinguishable genres, some exhibit various traits and qualities which cannot help but muddy any neat, predetermined distinctions. Bearing this in mind, the editors — in order to facilitate and simplify the classification process — will ultimately determine the key underlying elements found within each game, accordingly categorizing each new release from amongst the following genres:

Adventure: Usually, but not always viewed from a second or third-person perspective, adventures oftentimes focus upon the progress, actions and achievements of a single character as he or she advances through an unfolding story.
CRPG: Inspired by such stalwart pen-and-paper games as *Dungeons & Dragons*, we interpret computer, role-playing games as those products which require the methodical employment and use of several interdependent characters and inventory to reach an ultimate objective.

Simulation: We define a game as a simulation if it attempts to model actual machinery, weapons or vehicles. Therefore, games such as *X-Wing* and *Mechwarrior 2* are classified as action games since the behavioral characteristics and physical properties of these systems preclude any serious discussion on flight modeling, behavioral statistics, etc. Whenever possible, our writers will attempt to compare the simulation with its real-life counterpart, examining it for accuracy and level of detail portrayed.

Wargame: Essentially strategy games in nature, we define wargames as those second or third-person perspective products which replicate any period of history or near-term event from a purely military standpoint.
Strategy: These games usually require the player to manipulate resources, develop and expand an infrastructure or combat an enemy force in order to attain victory or achieve a set of predetermined objectives.

Edutainment: A term coined by the conglomeration of "education and entertainment." Oriented towards a preschool, school age or adolescent child, these products, although couched in playtime activities, are ultimately intended to teach the child various cognitive, developmental or interpersonal skills. To simplify matters, we also include interactive tales and animated storybooks within this category.

Sports: Fairly straightforward, we consider a product as a sports game if it replicates any present day sporting event (baseball, hockey, soccer, etc.) Games like *NASCAR Racing*, although replicating a sporting event, falls squarely under the realm of simulations since it relies upon the employment of a vehicle to simulate the event.

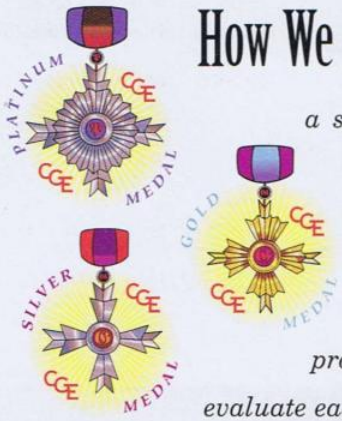
Multimedia: These titles, usually bereft of any significant game-playing elements, instead attempt to provide behind-the-scenes commentary or medium-specific focus.

Action: A fairly broad, rather all-encompassing category, action games include first, second and third-person shooters, side scrollers, fighting games and any simulations falling outside the aforementioned definition.

BECAUSE OUR WRITERS AND EDITORS are both skilled gamers and experienced reviewers, we believe it only fitting to grant them an unprecedented degree of latitude in their product analyses. Therefore, although the staff has implemented a standardized grading system and developed certain guidelines to help structure the overall reviewing process, the commentary, criticism and scores provided have been determined solely by the reviewer. Apart from certain grammatical corrections and editing practices, the staff refrains from tampering with a review in any manner, shape or form. We should like to point out that, wherever possible, we have striven to preserve the overall tone, style and content of any and all submissions in order to present an intelligent, balanced and unbiased appraisal of each product at hand.

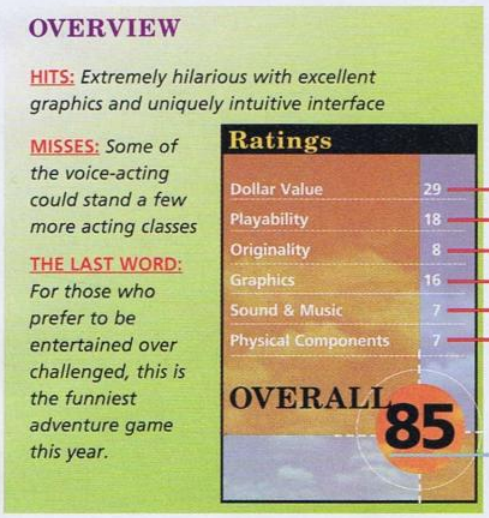
From time to time, *CGE* plans to run rebuttals, which will be authored by a member of the game's design or development team. Positioned opposite the review, our ultimate intent is to provide a balanced viewpoint that may or may not refute any of the comments raised by the reviewer. Like the reviews, rebuttals may be modified in accordance with spatial restraints.

Counterpoint
A rebuttal to G-Nome review
by Dan Donahue, Senior Software Engineer
REVIEW
G-NOME
by Samuel Bronte Baker II
G-NOME frequently felt more like a rail-shooter than a mechanistic robot sim.
OVERALL 44



How We Rate the Games

Game ratings are determined based upon the compilation of a number of weighted sub-factors. Utilizing a sliding scale (40 equaling the worst, 100 the best), awards can be garnered depending upon the overall score. Games attaining overall scores of 85 to 89 will earn themselves the coveted CGE *Silver Star. Games scoring in the neighborhood of 90 to 94 are awarded the highly-acclaimed* CGE *Gold Star; and especially noteworthy games scoring 95 or better are pinned with our proudest decoration; the* Computer Game Entertainment *Platinum Star. We evaluate each game and determine the scores based upon the following criteria:*


OVERVIEW
HITS: Extremely hilarious with excellent graphics and uniquely intuitive interface
MISSES: Some of the voice-acting could stand a few more acting classes
THE LAST WORD: For those who prefer to be entertained over challenged, this is the funniest adventure game this year.
Ratings
Dollar Value 29
Playability 18
Originality 8
Graphics 16
Sound & Music 7
Physical Components 7
OVERALL 85

Furthermore, we augment the scores by explaining some of the nuances, both good and bad, that we uncovered in our review in the Overview. If anything specific needs commenting or highlighting, we'll state it here.

HITS: In plain English, we outline the best features of the game.

MISSES: We succintly discuss factors such as omissions, incomprehensible manuals, glitches, bugs, etc.

THE LAST WORD: Used in conjunction with our overall score, this represents our bottom line, no-holds barred assessment of the product. If the score doesn't serve as a guide, then our final text-based assessment of the product should.

As you can see, our evaluations are all-encompassing, and attempt to discuss every relevant aspect of the game or peripheral product being reviewed. As product prices escalate and an ever greater number of products are released, we believe it is exceedingly important to provide you with the most detailed and timely analysis conceivable. We hope you appreciate our endeavors.

Dollar Value: Was the game worth every cent you spent on it?

Weighted Range = 5 - 30

Playability: Some of the most critical factors of a game are held up and scrutinized. Is the interface intuitive, gameplay seamless, and AI challenging enough to warrant extended play or a trip back to the store shelf?

Weighted Range = 5 - 20

Originality: Does the game break new ground or simply trod where others have already trekked?

Weighted Range = 1 - 10

Graphics: Does the product contain state-of-the-art animation, high-quality artwork, and fully-rendered objects and background scenery?

Weighted Range = 5 - 20

Sound & Music: Are the accompanying soundtracks rich, dynamic and appropriate, or do they seem destined to reverberate in the average dentist's office? Are the ambient sound effects realistic or mood-setting? Will the rest of the family scream, "turn it down!"?

Weighted Range = 1 - 10

Physical Components: Is there a printed manual? If so, does it and any other ancillary documentation provide concise and detailed information on how to understand and play the game?

Weighted Range = 1 - 10

Overall Score: Numerically, the most important rating of the bunch. The overall score is arrived at by tallying up all of the scores in the previous categories.

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS, WIN 95
Developer:	Cajji Software/ Gremlin Interactive	Publisher:	Interplay Productions
Telephone:	714-553-6678	Website:	www.interplay.com

Fragile Allegiance

by Ed Dille

GAME DESIGN is a risky business; few developers are willing to crawl out on the proverbial limb and really strive to achieve something new in the way of game experience. As such, far too many titles that appear today are simple knock-offs or hybrids of other more successful titles. This isn't to say that a game must be completely original to be good, but in a market replete with *Command & Conquer* and *DOOM*-esque clones, everyone's discovered that it's the execution of the design, not the engine itself, that makes the difference.

Fragile Allegiance (*FA*) attempts to combine elements of *SimCity*, *Command & Conquer*, *Master of Orion* and the lesser known *Full Metal Planet* (from the now defunct Draconian software group) into a grand strategic game of economic domination, and it does so with varying degrees of success. The fictional premise of the game is fairly familiar. Players are representatives of Tetracorp, a major mining conglomerate, whose charter is to colonize the asteroids of the "Fragmented Sectors" of space and exploit his or her resources. The Federation will purchase said resources, as will numerous black marketeers, thereby creating the cash flow the player needs to expand his or her operations. The Federation represents a rough coalition of all Terran and Alien cultures, even though the extraterrestrials will be competing against the player for the resources of the asteroid belt; after all, the player's financial success threatens the Alien's economic status. Think of it as a business simulation, with teeth, in which the Federation encourages survival of the fittest.

Players begin by selecting one of the dozen or so preselected games — encompassing different-sized arenas, asteroid densities, combinations of alien cultures and levels of aggression — or they can customize the settings to suit their own preferences. In multiplayer matches, up to eight players can compete. If you do manage to line up eight players, then each player must assume a Terran command; less than eight players, and any combination of human and computer-controlled alien cultures are permitted to play.

Meet your business competitors!

Tutorials walk new players through the basics of everything, from colony management to black market trading, making it possible to dive into the game immediately without reading the manual. There are a couple of mentions on how to appoint colony supervisors and other details which are only found in the manual, so it behooves the player to invest the time needed to read it thoroughly. Although not entirely intuitive, the interface becomes familiar with repeated play. Players will find themselves breezing back and forth between mundane tasks, such as ore trading, or the more vicarious pursuits of combat.

"FRAGILE ALLEGIANCE *is a business simulation with teeth.*"

The first step is to develop an original self-sustaining colony capable of supplying its own power, water and the necessities of life in deep space. Profitability, in terms of ore production, is also critical. Ore must be sold to lubricate the cash-flow cogs of progress, necessary for expansion and all but required for ship and weapon construction. The resources of a single asteroid become depleted fairly rapidly, so rapid expansion is essential for long-term survival. The trick is to use ore transporters (the plans for which must be purchased from Sci-Tek — more on that in a moment) to ferry resources quickly back to the base planet. Players should concentrate their defenses then teleport ore to the stronghold, for use in the weapons program, or sell them to generate income.

Because ore is finite, the player need not attempt to defend dozens of aster-

AI colony supervisors tend to overbuild.

oids, most of which are no longer productive. This was an inherent failing of *Master of Orion*: Players could send one strong fleet rampaging through the galaxy, even after they had lost the resources to replenish any losses incurred. The other players would have to follow in the wake of the marauder, recapturing planets and eventually putting a stop to the process. Simply put, prolonged campaigns based upon attrition become rather boring. *Fragile Allegiance* avoids this altogether, charging players to exploit asteroid deposits quickly, before everyone else, and then carry on with their expansion plans. The limited resource model is more suited to this type of game than the factory-laden planets of infinite production portrayed in *Master of Orion*.

Unfortunately, the hired, computer-controlled colony supervisors don't seem to understand this very same "exploit and abandon" concept. Instead, they tend toward overbuilding each of the colonies under their control. Building colonies is handled in *SimCity*-like fashion; players can handle the details of building construction and placement or allow the colony supervisors to manage these and other aspects. Supervisors are needed to help keep employees in line, ensure efficiency and maintain security. Their utilization improves gameplay considerably; unfortunately, they typically will squander resources on unnecessary structures and place structures too close to one another, thereby increasing their susceptibility to attack. Players, therefore, must be very selective about which asteroids they will personally manage and which can be turned over to the computer for control.

On the surface, *FA* retains a similar combat system to, say, *Command & Conquer*, but their likenesses end there. In *FA*, the combat system is out of kilter with the limited nature of the resource pool. For instance, it takes a lot of damage to knock out an enemy asteroid equipped with a repair facility. Therefore, saturating the enemy defenses is preferable to prolonged assaults. The fact that ships have customizable hardpoints means that the player can build fleets of mutually supporting craft, each of which has a specialized purpose, then implement them in a form of combined arms campaign. A good plan of action, but players who follow it may realize that they are pursuing a less than profitable path to glory. Perhaps this is the designers' intent — to enumerate the economic aspects over those of the military. If that's the case, then they succeeded. But the point, nevertheless, clearly needed to be made that players are esconced in economic turmoil as well as military. To paraphrase Carl von Clausewitz, "war is simply a continuation of politics by other means," and in *Fragile Allegiance*, politics are centered on economic domination.

Fortunately, there are other methods of gaining the upper hand, short of direct conflict. A good portion of the game involves the use of agents to infiltrate enemy asteroids, conduct espionage, obtain information and inhibit the enemy's ability to one-up the player. Expect similar treatment in return, though, as unsupervised colonies pose especially ripe targets. To reduce the effects of enemy espionage, assign an agent to conduct like operations so as to reveal enemy operatives lurking about. Agents can be very helpful, but they are absolutely expensive to use on a regular basis.

Diplomacy can be handled either directly or via the Terran ambassador to the Federation. Diplomacy, though, isn't an exact science, and sometimes intended results are never assured. Happily, each side can present two counter-proposals, ranging from a joint military pact to a non-aggression agreement. This lends a pleasant sense of bartering and negotiation to the simulation that isn't evident in other plain vanilla-type games.

To succeed, technological improvements must be implemented over time. Players purchase the blueprints of the desired item from Sci-Tek then wait until they arrive on the next Federation ore shuttle. This keeps the playing field fairly well-balanced, but it also eliminates all of the research and development strategies that proved to be such a satisfying aspect of *Master of Orion*. In retrospect, the developers have come up with some cool toys to tinker with. For instance, asteroid engines are available which let players drive their holdings around space, even permitting them to ram enemy asteroids.

Another sticky point concerns the multiplayer aspects of the game. The best campaigns are those that provide plenty of room to maneuver and lots of asteroids to exploit. Naturally, these campaigns are typically the most complex and time consuming to finish, so it's harder to lasso and herd a group of players together long enough to complete the game. Therefore, *FA* is less suited to multiplayer pursuits than *Command & Conquer* or other popular multiplayer titles; but it's still a very good head-to-head game for two or three player connections.

All in all, *Fragile Allegiance* is not as "fragile" as most hybridized products. Its play mechanics and pacing are compelling reasons to overlook most of the aforementioned shortcomings. Simply stated, *FA* won't redefine the genre; nevertheless, it's a "bread and butter" title for those players who live on a steady diet of strategy and galactic domination. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Solid interface, good tutorials, well-designed economic model that promotes rapid expansion and good game pacing.*

MISSES: *Combat model isn't balanced with economic model, AI supervision of colonies is of limited use, R&D model is too rigid .*

THE LAST WORD: *Peace through superior buying power.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	25
Playability	18
Originality	5
Graphics	15
Sound & Music	8
Physical Components	9

OVERALL 80

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	Interactive Magic	Publisher:	Interactive Magic
Telephone:	888-746-2442	Website:	www.imagicgames.com

Fallen Haven

by Bill Holmes

OCCURRING somewhere after the galactic "big bang," but well before the dinosaurs were meteorized into fertilizer, a wonderful moment in our planet's history took place. Archeologists believe that small legless creatures crept out of the swamps, slyly crawled towards their fellow pioneers, hoisted themselves onto their hind legs and, of all things, played chess. Or was it *Risk*? No matter. Although we've come a long way, we're still motivated by our most basic instinct to defend our turf, casting stones at one another in the name of freedom. With *Fallen Haven*, Interactive Magic has spun a strange new tale, twisting anew this curious compulsion to hammer plowshares into swords of war.

Fallen Haven combines a turn-based wargame with certain features of diverse classics such as *Sim City, Civilization, X-COM* — and, yes, even *Outpost.* To win — heck, to stay alive — the gamer must juggle technology, finance and military deployment, using judicious timing. Dig in or attack? Develop a more profitable province in a few more turns or risk losing it all to air strikes of a less patient opponent? There are endless scenarios to pursue.

Fallen Haven is set centuries in the future; its object is to capture the opponent's capital province and, hence, control the entire planet. There's a brief story line which adequately sets the background for the conflict, but it all boils down to this: kill or be killed. The player can choose to assume the role of a human or of a Tauran — a member of the alien race. The game manual's preamble lends a sympathetic ear to both sides' motives. Part of the fun of playing as a Tauran, of course, is that you get to waste humans and get away with it. In real life, you'd probably have to be an ex-football player or a vengeful government employee to do that.

Hammering plowshares into swords — or Hover Tanks, as the case may be.

The comparisons that have been made to *Sim City* are somewhat accurate. Even the most primitive version of *Sim City* was centered on managing geographical assets and developing resources to produce a profitable and well-balanced environment. Then Godzilla would attack or a natural disaster would strike with amazing regularity. Well, consider this game "*Sim War*," where Godzilla is not only loping along, but you now have the opportunity to head him off at the pass. Become strong and diverse — or kiss it all good-bye!

"Fallen Haven *is* EXCITING, CHALLENGING *and, oh, so much* FUN."

The player must manage energy and resources while researching technology to survive and prosper. Buildings generate energy and technology, but they also expend energy and cost money. Turning a province into a self-sufficient and thriving area will yield critically important improvements while simultaneously providing the necessary surplus to protect existing regions and develop others. Research is segmented into six central pursuits, and, during the Strategic turn, the player can determine what percentage of his or her efforts will be expended and where the dollars will go. As time and resources are invested, players attain higher levels which, in turn, permit improvement and add a host of new features. The manual contains a helpful chart, indicating how these improvements affect the various troops and buildings portrayed in the game.

Getting started is a snap; the menus and control interface are intuitive, and most buttons even have "tool tips" which facilitate play. Players can select an item to repair or build, by picking it from a list and simply positioning the cursor over it. The upper screen always displays the amount of credits (money) available, and each item has a description and associated cost read-

ily visible. No clutter, no mess! Put the manual away, because you won't need it. Focus, instead, on the game playing elements.

Play starts in the main province, which depicts an abbreviated contingent of what troops and materials are available. Although the first task is to start bulking up on everything, the actual methodology is left to the player. While there is some flexibility to the selection and placement of roads and structures, there are finite limits regarding what can be created in each province. Although this at first seems restrictive, it forces the player to grab new territories. Remember, though, that there's a war going on! Players who get too wrapped up in becoming outer space's first City Planner will wind up excavating a crash site instead.

The game is played in two modes: Strategic and Tactical. In Strategic mode, there is no time limitation. The player freely moves troops and units into place, builds and/or repairs structures and roads and gives commands. Conversely, the Tactical mode follows the strategic turn and, essentially, constitutes the active component. Before each turn, the player can react to events and maneuver his or her forces in preparation for the next turn. Unfortunately, building and repairs can not take place.

Sometimes adjacent territories will invoke the pursuit of special missions, which usually involves a lot of explosive operations. Beyond annexing territories, the potential reward usually entails some new technology or added manpower that can certainly help out with future conquest. If players ignore their home base, they could be stripped of the capability to create and launch the all-important dropships. Players must remind themselves that their objective is the enemy's capital; controlling every province is not a prerequisite for winning.

There are three levels of difficulty for the basic games. In the simplest mode, both sides are relatively equal in ability and development. As the difficulty levels rise, so does the ability of the opposing side. Regardless, the opponent *always* gets stronger as the game goes on, presenting a more formidable and challenging foe at every turn. For veteran players, there is even the "Last Hope" campaign, which can best be termed as a suicide mission. The enemy owns all the territories save one, and it isn't likely to just lay down and let someone walk all over its possessions. This conflict represents a serious challenge for both experienced wargamers and strategy players alike.

The player must balance any skills attained against liabilities incurred to compare whether the risk outweighs the possibility of being backed into a corner. New technology is not only a wonderful asset but absolutely vital; but it should never be sought if it forsakes prosperity. After all, those glorious facilities won't hum along if no one's paying the electric bill.

Good micro-managers should be able to push off once they've become acclimated to the interface. Pay attention to how different units move, inflict and incur damage. Notice where troops are safe and where they simply ignite like a stack of Roman candles. Learn how to effectively manage action points in battle, while stocking up armor points for defense. After a short time even a novice warmonger should be able to kick a little intergalactic butt without worrying about instantaneous decimation.

The animation and sound during the turn-based combat mode are crisp and clear. The machinery and buildings are well crafted and, as technology progresses, the combat sequences become a delight to watch. Buggies, tanks and hovercraft jockey for position, while fusion towers and laser cannons try their best to take them out. Terrain plays a central role in combat, as do the defensive works constructed by the host province. Learning how to box out an opponent from a key area is as important as the method of attack. Advanced rocketry permits long range assault, while radar helps the player defend and thwart off any nasty surprises.

Unfortunately, the humble foot soldiers don't get the attention that they richly deserve. Although they can learn to run faster, jump higher and lob ammo with improved accuracy, they aren't afforded a set of characteristics which can be developed, exploited and nurtured to the fullest. *X-COM* and *Jagged Alliance* exemplify a more mature concept, permitting more unit specialization due, in large part, to their focus on character development. While I agree that in any game there needn't be an abundance of things to manage (who wants to get bogged down in minutiae?), this should've been a feature that can be toggled or tinkered with at the gamer's option.

Consider this game **SIM War.**

Haven, good as it is, is screaming for the inclusion of multiplayer capability. It's far better when a player can stare down an unpredictable opponent who invariably learns and anticipates moves with every added gaming session. A cyber-visit to the Interactive Magic website indicated that this is indeed planned for a future release. Let's hope they do it — and soon.

I must confess that, for sheer enjoyment, versatility and atmosphere in a fantasy strategy game, I don't know if anything will ever surpass *X-COM*. But make room on your hard drive, folks — *Fallen Haven* is exciting, challenging and oh, so much fun. Kudos to Interactive Magic for coming up with a great game that has stolen my valuable gaming time for more hours than I care to recall. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Versatile gameplay levels, endless scenarios, fun and easy to play!.*

MISSES: *Not many; maybe more personality (i.e. the troops) and a wider array of items to develop.*

THE LAST WORD: *Fun, challenging and worth the hard disk space.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	28
Playability	8
Originality	19
Graphics	18
Sound & Music	9
Physical Components	8

OVERALL **90**

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	Bullfrog Prod.	Publisher:	Bullfrog Productions, LTD
Telephone:	512-434-4263	Website:	www.bullfrog.co.uk

Theme Hospital

by Brian Workman

THEME PARK was an enormously popular game that has sold over a million copies to date, even though it is now almost two years old. The original game pitted the player against an intricate economic model, lavishly adorned in cute, colorfully animated graphics. The player's goal was to micro-manage a comical amusement park, raising revenue by continual park expansion. *Theme Hospital* — a tongue-in-cheek crossover attempt to micro-manage an affable hospital — builds on the legacy of *Theme Park*.

Every aspect of building, designing and maintaining a hospital were fully researched by the development team and implemented where appropriate. In fact, the system requires the player to balance a hospital's budget, attract the competitions' patients and research new cures and machines endemic to modern medicine. Details include: where to place the plants and waste bins, how many janitors to hire and how capable a staff the player can realistically afford. The game will even charge nonplayer characters (NPCs) $20 for a soft drink. How's that for realism? In the meantime, there are three computer-controlled opponents running their own hospitals, directly competing with the player to put him or her permanently out of business.

Running in real time, *Theme Hospital* contains three difficulty levels, each containing a number of hospitals. The goal, then, is to advance through each corresponding hospital in order to complete the game. Mind you, each hospital is different in size and, therefore, suffers from an inherent list of problems. As the player advances, the number of maladies increases, along with some other atypical events. Earthquakes can occur, which speed up the deterioration of important machinery. Boilers can break down, which can create environmental concerns that ultimately affect the safety and welfare of the patients. Infestation can arise as well as other more unsightly health hazards!

Even a small vomit wave can really cause havoc.

Various NPC's will be admitted to the hospital for the most part suffering from an assortment of strange maladies and curious diseases. In fact, players will have to diagnose upward of 30 odd, scary and oftentimes whimsical ailments before they can move on. Slack Tongue, for instance, is a weird affliction that causes the patient's tongue to elongate, sometimes reaching 12 inches or more. Hairyitis is the uncontrollable growth of body hair caused by overexposure to the moon. The cure, of course, is electrolysis. Bloaty Head, on the other hand, which induces the patient's cranium to inflate, is typically caused by the sniffing of cheese and drinking of rain water. The cure, quite ironically, is to pop like a boil then re-inflate. King's Complex is the uncontrollable desire to wear suede shoes and eat cheeseburgers. All in all, players will have loads of fun developing cures to these and other imaginative ailments.

Players charge their doctors, nurses, receptionists and handymen to combat each set of problems. Nurses run the ward, pharmacy and some of the clinics. Hiring personnel can become an entertaining endeavor in and of itself, since some of the prospective candidates exhibit some really quirky behavior. For all intents and purposes, the receptionist doubles as a triage nurse, instrumental in directing each patient to the proper diagnosis room or into the clinic for treatment. The handymen clean up, feed and nurture the plants and repair the hospital's vital machinery. When nausea plagues the hospital — one patient sees another getting sick — the handymen must be tasked to sanitize the hospital before it can recur. Heaven forbid someone gets sick in a crowded waiting room!

The most important NPCs are the doctors. Doctors are segmented into one of three seniority levels equipped with one of

three general skills. Seniority determines how capable a doctor is in performing his duties; a junior doctor is slow and less accurate in diagnosing a problem than a consultant. Consultants cost more but are the only practictioners able to train less senior doctors until they themselves are able to attain the consulting level. Three doctor-skill levels are portrayed: surgeons, researchers and psychiatry. The researcher level is the most important in the game; researchers develop the drugs and equipment needed to cure any new diseases, while refining and improving treatment of known maladies.

Each level begins on an antiseptic note; players have nothing more than a barebones facility and a stingy budget with which to get their hospital operational. Furthermore, the player has a limited amount of time to outfit the hospital with enough personnel and equipment before opening to the public. After that, the player must add clinics and staff, developing treatments for the most common ailments walking through the doors.

Four types of rooms can be added to the hospital: diagnosis, treatment, clinics and facilities. Once players reach a prescribed level of expertise, undefined maladies stop appearing, and the hospital begins to rake in some serious cash. At this point, the system will prompt the player to either remain at their current level or to accept a job at another hospital.

While curing patients is a critical concern, there are many other subtle facets of play that have an effect on progress. For instance, although handymen keep the hospital clean and eliminate rodenticide and other epidemics, they also maintain any machinery present. And let's not forget that larger hospitals require more than one receptionist to handle the volume of patients rolling in.

Amputations anyone?

A hospital's reputation is no less important. Hospitals touting the best reputations receive the most patients. Other factors include how well the hospitals handle emergencies, its record on recorded epidemics, the number of patients that die during the course of treatment and visits by various dignitaries.

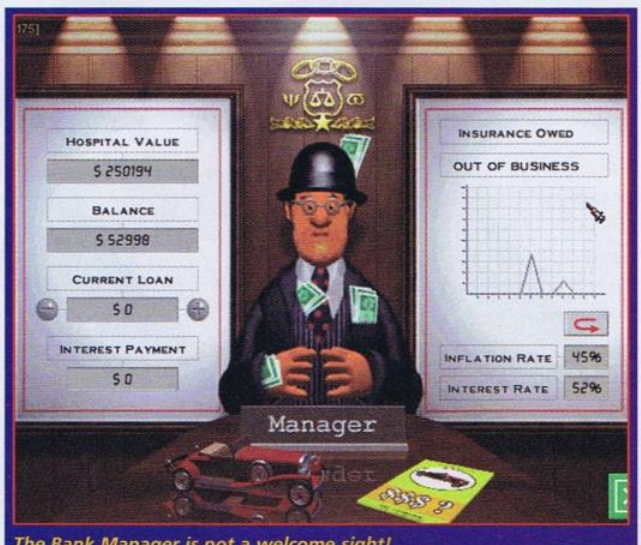
Game play is simple to master. Working in conjunction with the keyboard, the mouse is used to control all of the functions and to pull down menus. Windows 95 installation was relatively painless. The only problem during play occurred because the difficulty level couldn't be adjusted.

In hi-res mode the graphics were outstanding. NPCs continuously perform exceptionally detailed actions such as putting away files and sewing up surgical wounds. Likewise, the liberal use of sound effects was excellent throughout — right down to the video game clattering away in the staff room. Music, oddly, is constrained: only eight selections are included. It is, however, evocative — best described as the type you'd hear in an elevator.

The manual is adequate and contains much of the most important information necessary to initiate play. Some players may complain that the manual does not contain all of the requisite criteria, such as dissertations on all of the many arcane diseases. Perhaps a valid point, it nevertheless might be more challenging for the player to ascertain each illness. In any event, Bullfrog plans to release a companion guide outlining these and other aspects of the game.

Currently, the game has a few minor bugs and, as it stands, permits only one player to butt heads against the AI. A multiplayer patch is forthcoming and should be released by the time this article appears. Available free at Bullfrog's Web site (www.bullfrog.co.uk), this conversion should establish a four-player Internet option as well as modem play. According to the developers, players will be able to steal patients from one another, introducing epidemics to discredit and sully the other hospitals.

Basically, *Theme Hospital* is very good and will no doubt appeal to a widely divergent audience. The game sidesteps any gory content. Its goal is to make the players squeamish, not ill. Although it doesn't break any new ground, the game is fun and a joy to play. As kooky as they come, *Theme Hospital* is a near "certifiable" success. CGE



The Bank Manager is not a welcome sight!

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Graphics and imaginative diseases.*

MISSES: *Small glitches and initial release without multiplayer capability.*

THE LAST WORD: *Will be a great game when everything is fixed.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	27
Playability	18
Originality	8
Graphics	18
Sound & Music	7
Physical Components	7

OVERALL **85**

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS
Developer:	Digital Reality	Publisher:	GT Interactive
Telephone:	800-305-9990	Website:	www.gtinteractive.com

Imperium Galactica

by Robert Mayer

SPACE-BASED strategy games seem to be perennial favorites. From the earliest days of mainframes, influenced by — but by no means licensed to — *Star Trek* to today's PC-based extravaganzas (*Master of Orion 2*, *Star Control 3* and, soon, *Starcraft*), outer space has never been relegated to gaming oblivion. After all, intergalactic backdrops have lots working in their favor: the introduction of alien races, futuristic technology and freedom from the mundane bonds of terrestrial physics and history. Not surprisingly, nearly every computer game publisher in existence has, or probably will have, some sort of space-based game sitting on store shelves.

The latest to invade Earth hails from GT Interactive, with the assistance of developer Digital Reality. A DOS-based game which ships on two CD-ROMs, *Imperium Galactica* features tactical ground and outer space combat, fleet strategy and colony construction and development; at the upper echelons, invokes diplomacy and even grand strategy. Visually attractive, solidly structured and effectively paced, *Imperium Galactica* should have been a fine addition to the ever-burgeoning star-crossed genre. Unfortunately, while the game is by no means bad, it's nowhere near as deserving of honors as it could be. Imbued with small problems, glaring mistakes, and an assortment

of annoying bugs, *Imperium Galactica* devolves into a frustrating gaming experience.

First, the good parts — *Imperium Galactica* has it all! The player must don several hats throughout the course of play, defending against marauding pirates one moment, planning how to combat famine on a desert planet the next. Employing overwhelming firepower may prove judicious under certain circumstances; at times, though, finesse rather than force is required — discretion ably demonstrating itself as the better part of valor. An ever-widening array of options become available, ranging from space combat formations to increased diplomatic power, as the player attempts to administer a broader and ever more complex sector of outer space.

Your opponent will do his best to put an end to your supply ship if you don't stop him.

Graphically, the game is attractive but inconsistent. The star map, crude and somewhat reminiscent of several EGA-based games of the 1980s, contrasts with the wonderfully crisp colony displays. Moreover, the space combat screens resemble a cross between the old *Rules of Engagement* products and Interstel's ill-fated *Star Fleet* series. Oddly enough, combat is curiously similar to a miniature version of *Command & Conquer* on an interstellar scale. Most data and informational screens are fine, though the fonts haven't been selected for clarity of purpose. Cutscenes are merely average, and the snippets of full-motion video range from forgettable to embarrassing. The acting is by and large atrocious — e.g., ship's captains beaming over distress signals seem like outtakes from a badly-written episode of *Battlestar: Galactica*. Still, it all hangs together on an acceptable level, avoiding any glaring programming lapses or entirely disastrous gaming moments.

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Tries to accomplish a great many feats and sometimes succeeds.*

MISSES: *Incredibly arbitrary victory conditions, of which the player remains largely ignorant; poor manual; doesn't do anything particularly well.*

THE LAST WORD: *Cast a cold eye on "be-all" strategy games that in reality achieve very little.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	10
Playability	6
Originality	10
Graphics	13
Sound & Music	5
Physical Components	8

OVERALL **52**

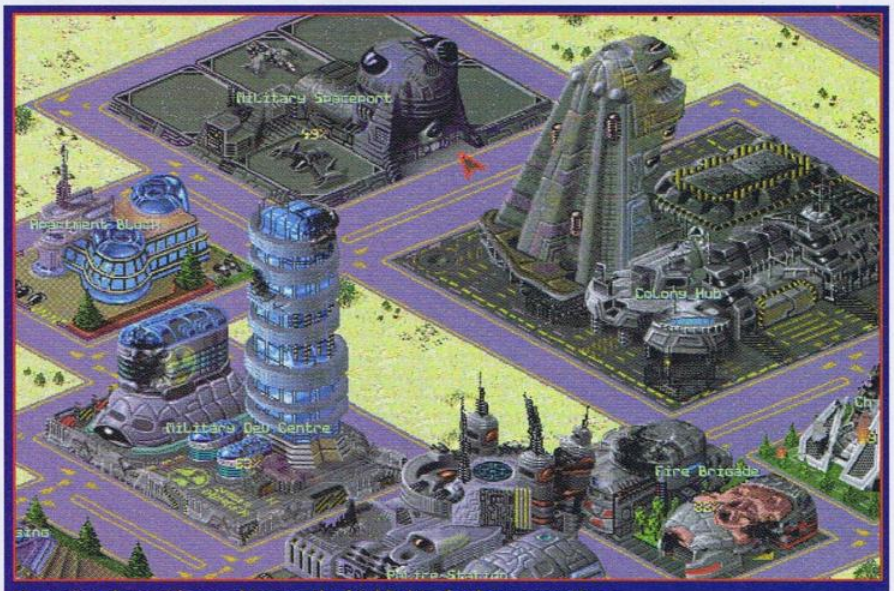
So, why does *Imperium Galactica* fail to live up to expectations? Space combat is fairly simplistic. While easy to grasp, the concept put forth provides little opportunity to experiment with tactics. But the system does have its merits: permitting players to issue orders while the game remains paused is a feature that should be adopted by more real-time game developers. Unfortunately, the final effect of *Imperium Galactica* is far from agreeable; the diminutive ship graphics adorning the combat map provide little in the way of atmosphere or battle management.

Colony development is somewhat primitive, portraying the purchase of new buildings and housing, providing sustenance for the inhabitants, generating power and constructing production facilities. Sadly, I never had the impression that there were overt distinctions among the many different planets. In fact, I felt as if whatever worked well on one world might work just as easily on a completely different planet. Furthermore, developing a properly advanced infrastructure became a moot point; after I adjusted for several factors — building the appropriate structures at the appropriate times — I felt as if I had learned all there was to managing my colony.

Ground combat was equally understated. Even though I was able to give orders during lulls in the action, the system was unable to zoom in or rotate the colony map. Similarly, I was unable to keep track of where all the units were. Moreover, the rather generic real-time battle engine was far too fatiguing to fully enjoy.

Although mysterious video messages and cutscenes hint at some events transpiring behind the scenes, there are no clues given as to what, or how the player should react. The most egregious of these devices includes a personality profile test that appears out of the blue during the first Commander mission. Fail to pick the correct answers — and neither the manual nor any on-line sources even hint at the interrogatation or its answer — and the game ends as a dismissal and defeat.

What remains, then, is a game that never delivers on its ambitious promises, while offering variety at the questionable cost of design implementation and arbitrarily derived plot development. The next *Master of Orion*, it's not. CGE



Very nice planetside graphics are the highlight of colony operations.

Counterpoint

A rebuttal to *Imperium Galactica* review

by Digital Reality
Developer of
Imperium Galactica

Imperium Galactica is a "big" game; a game purposefully designed to offer hours of game play. As the game progresses, player responsibilities and capabilities increase with missions and combat, becoming more involved and requiring more thought. *Imperium Galactica* requires a time investment to fully experience and enjoy the many exciting nuances in the game.

Tactically, the space battles in *Imperium Galactica* are at first blush simplistic, requiring minimal experience or strategy to defeat your foes. However, as your crews gain experience and you rise within the ranks, the fighting intensity picks up. Specific tactics — such as using a heavily-damaged fighter as a kamikaze, or developing new technologies to gain superiority over your opponent — therefore become crucial.

Initially, colony development may appear rudimentary, especially if you adjust several factors and build the appropriate structures at the appropriate times. However, that strategy will backfire as you advance in rank, especially once you achieve the rank of Commander. Managing colonies to obtain revenue will never suffice.

Contrary to popular belief, in ground combat players are able to track where all their units are via a radar car. In addition, when players build their colonies, it's important to position and defend mission-critical locations and buildings. Even a relatively understated task, such as planning road structures, becomes crucial with regard to tank movements, reinforcements, etc., and requires a strategic plan of defense.

We appreciate the opportunity to clarify a few points expressed in the review, and believe that fans of the genre will find *Imperium Galactica* a fun and thought-provoking experience. CGE

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 3.1, WIN 95
Developer:	Talonsoft	Publisher:	Talonsoft, Inc.
Telephone:	410-933-9191	Website:	www.talonsoft.com

Napoleon in Russia

by Ed Dille

ALTHOUGH A LOT of players would be loath to admit it, paper-based wargaming is one of the wellsprings from which all forms of computer entertainment have grown. And the limitations of that form — from the time it takes to play the larger scenarios, to the care which must be taken to maintain a game in progress over a period of weeks or months — caused many wargame enthusiasts to also become early owners of computers. With some patience and a little persistence, players always had an opponent available, not to mention a game that could be saved and picked up again at any point in time.

To a lesser degree, wargames have been stigmatized, blamed for not containing as much "eye candy" as other genres. True to some extent, they have therefore been superficially judged as being less developed, however unfair that criticism might be. Talonsoft's *Battleground* Series has succeeded in removing many of these barriers and may even be credited with inspiring a resurgence of interest in the art of wargaming.

Napoleon in Russia: The Battle of Borodino addresses the pivotal engagements in Napoleon's fateful Eastern campaign. At the beginning of the campaign, Napoleon had amassed over 650,000 troops in Eastern Europe. By the time the game begins, however, Napoleon's forces, attempting to man a frontier some 700 miles in length, have dwindled to a mere 165,000 men and 585 guns. At Borodino, 70 miles shy of Moscow, Napoleon attempted to draw Kutusov's combined force of 121,000 men and 640 guns into a final and decisive engagement. Kutusov denied Napoleon his goal, whittling down the French Army in the process to an even worse state. Although Kutusov failed to prevent Moscow from falling to the French, the Russians managed to set fire to their beloved capital, just as the French arrived. For the French, Moscow's capture was significant — for all the wrong reasons. The expensive strategy of relinquishing scorched earth to buy time paid off handsomely for the Russians. Like Charles XII of Sweden before him and Adolf Hitler after him, Napoleon would soon learn a bitter lesson on the barren and frozen Russian steppes.

NIR uses huge maps for the larger scenarios, so the entire historical deployment can be depicted.

Napoleon in Russia includes 21 scenarios, ranging from eight to 52 turns in length. Each turn is composed of a Movement, Defensive Fire, Offensive Fire, Cavalry Charge and Melee phase. Players may command either side in the grand battle, or focus in on particular engagements raging across the battlefield. Players may even reenact several fictitious variants; one, for example, postulates a second battle at Borodino when the French, retreating from Moscow, were suddenly attacked by the Cossacks.

Although solitaire games against the computer happen to play better than earlier installments in the series, the system still seems to handle its cavalry units rather timidly. Although gamers will enjoy these single player sessions, it's nice to know that they may also "hot seat" with another player, battle head-to-head over a modem connection, or simply e-mail turns back and forth.

For a wargame, the graphics are really beautiful! In fact, *Napoleon in Russia* ably captures the flavor and aesthetic splendor of the more conventional but cumbersome world of tabletop miniatures. *Napoleon in Russia* maintains this level of detail throughout, even down to the regalia of each individual unit. From a gamer's standpoint then, players will feel as if they are living history, not just observing it. And for those players who prefer to view unit icons or die-cut counters, these options are also available.

Finally, the command and control interface employed in the *Battleground* series is perhaps the most well thought-out wargame menuing system ever crafted. Everything a player needs to know about a unit will pop up with but a single mouse click. By zooming in and out on the map, it's easy to keep track of the big picture. Moreover, players needn't worry about such mundane details as unit facing within a stack. Other, less frequently examined, information is located in a concise pull-down menu that remains out of the way until a player needs it. All in all, it's simple, neat, and it's clean. Who said wargames weren't meant to be fun? CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: NIR's *interface is flawless, providing control of even the minutest details.*

MISSES: *The AI, though improved, still pales against savvy human opposition.*

THE LAST WORD: *Simply the finest Napoleonic wargame on the market.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	28
Playability	17
Originality	8
Graphics	18
Sound & Music	9
Physical Components	10
OVERALL	90

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 3.1, WIN 95
Developer:	Talonsoft	Publisher:	Talonsoft, Inc.
Telephone:	410-933-9191	Website:	www.talonsoft.com

Battleground 7: Bull Run

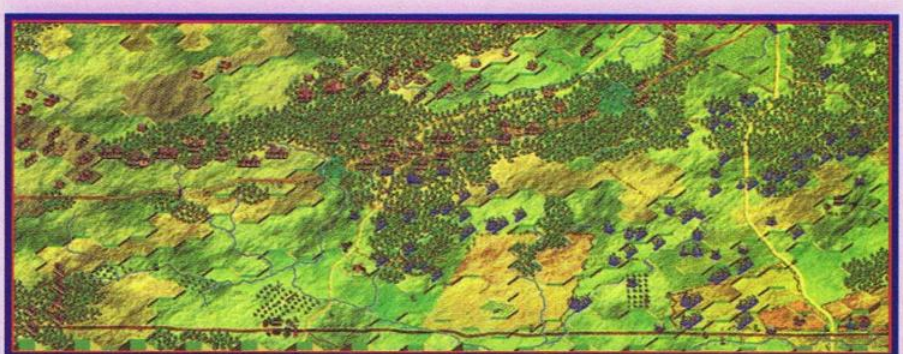
by Ed Dille

BATTLEGROUND 7: BULL RUN is "Bull" in name only. This is one serious simulation. The seventh installment in Talonsoft's venerable "Battleground" series deals, unsurprisingly, with the Civil War battles at Manassas.

Veterans of the earlier "Battleground" releases *Gettysburg*, *Shiloh* or *Antietam* will be able to jump right into the game without much of a refresher, although Talonsoft has updated some of the game play mechanics in this release. For example, disrupted units are no longer capable of Melee attacks. Also, the fields of fire for units in line have been broadened almost to the flanks. But all things considered, the command and control interface is relatively unchanged — which is good, since it is about the best wargame menu system ever crafted.

The battlefield at Manassas is the site of two of the greatest Confederate victories of the War Between the States. By the by, this is the politically correct way for progressive Southern gentlemen to refer to the conflict which occurred between 1861-1865. There certainly was nothing "Civil" about that war, and "The War of Northern Aggression" usually only seems fitting at the "Sons and Daughters of the Confederacy" pie socials.

The first Battle of Manassas, or "First Bull Run" as it is more commonly known, occurred in 1861. It was the first large-scale engagement between Union and Confederate forces. The Union Army was headed by General McDowell, who attempted to pin General Beauregard's troops in place with a frontal diversion, while conducting a circuitous envelopment of the flanks in Napoleonic fashion. Unfortunately, McDowell's feints were fairly obvious, and Beauregard was able to re-deploy Jubal Early's troops to counter the main assault on his flank.



Von Moltke referred to the armies at Bull Run as "two howling mobs...."

Other Confederate commanders distinguished themselves as well, including J.E.B. Stuart, Kirby Smith and T.J. "Stonewall" Jackson. "Stonewall" earned his nickname in this battle by holding the line after the Confederate troops to his front fled their positions around Henry House Hill.

In the end, McDowell's attempts at an orderly retreat degenerated into a rout. The roads back to Washington were clogged with Union troops in total disarray, mixed among panicked civilians who had come out to watch the battle with their picnic baskets.

Second Bull Run occurred in 1862, after General Jackson's brilliant campaign in the Shenandoah Valley, and barely a month after General McClellan was forced to retreat by sea from the Virginia peninsula. General Pope was marching another Union Army south toward Richmond, and General Lee sallied forth to meet him at Manassas Junction. Lee's success in the Second Battle of Bull Run convinced him to go on the offensive, and set the stage for the bloody Battle of Antietam shortly thereafter.

Battleground 7: Bull Run allows players to recreate each of the main battles, including a grueling 90-turn, two-day campaign. The real beauty of the offering, though, lays in the 20 smaller scenarios. These provide players with the opportunity to examine key engagements in detail, exclusive of the "battle" raging around them. Although many previous games have examined Bull Run in the aggregate, the scenarios will seem new and fresh even to veteran wargamers.

Bull Run features hand-painted backgrounds, inspired by the actual topographic renderings of the battlefield provided by the National Park Service. Unit colorings are not as detailed as in the Napoleonic-era titles in the series, but they still evoke the feel of watching a 3D tabletop miniatures battle. The period feel is further enhanced by music by Bobby Horton, who also contributed to the popular PBS series *The Civil War*. It was a joy to hear ditties and marches that were authentic but unfamiliar, instead of "Dixie" droning on endlessly as so many other games have done.

Personal touches like that have come to characterize the series, which has definitely been a labor of love for Jim Rose and the designers at Talonsoft. Fortunately, their love hasn't gone unnoticed by players, and *Bull Run* shouldn't either. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Melee rules have improved. Unit facing is more forgiving.*

MISSES: *The maps could use about two more levels of zoom to allow players to really focus in on detail when necessary.*

THE LAST WORD: Bull Run *outruns even* Shiloh, *despite the number of awards the latter received.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	28
Playability	17
Originality	7
Graphics	17
Sound & Music	9
Physical Components	10
OVERALL	88

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS, WIN 95
Developer:	Westwood Studios	Publisher:	Westwood Studios
Telephone:	702-228-4040	Website:	www.westwood.com

Red Alert: Counterstrike

by Brian Workman

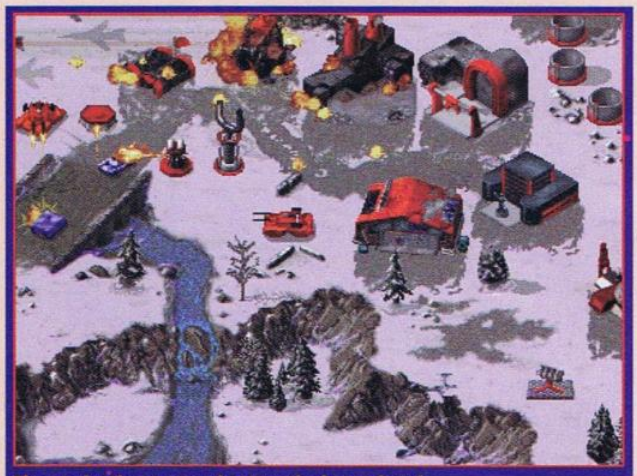
THE PREMISE behind *Command & Conquer: Red Alert,* which intermixes world history and time travel, stems from a wild yet somehow believable tale. It's been determined that killing Adolf Hitler before he becomes Reich Chancellor of Germany could prevent World War II from ever occurring. But when an assassin, sent back through time, succeeds in eliminating this scourge of mankind, the results are confounding — the inherent social ills and political turmoil of the period are still strangely manifested. Although the Holocaust and World War II never take place, the power vacuum in Europe, created by a weakened Germany, only green lights Stalin to commence Soviet military aggression well ahead of schedule. His initial goal is to combine Western and Central Europe with the Soviet state to create an engorged Soviet-style utopian society. Standing in his way, though, are the meager forces of the Allied nations and, of course, you.

Playable in Windows 95 and DOS formats, the original *Red Alert* contained fourteen interlinked Soviet and Allied missions. Several ad hoc missions were also included which effectively succeeded in having the player reach the same endgame. The *Counterstrike* mission disk adds an additional eight missions per side to the conflict.

Oddly, *Counterstrike* doesn't contain an instruction handbook; the company reasoned that owners of the original game already knew how to play it and therefore had no use for more pulp. Gameplay is simple and straightforward, control provided by the mouse and a few keyboard commands. The player can choose to play against the computer, initiate head-to-head action using a null-modem or Internet connection and can battle against up to eight players over an IPX network.

Some of the new units, however add a number of new wrinkles to an already critically acclaimed title. For instance, there is the Tesla tank, a unit that, in theory, could rule every scenario. Fortunately, the designers recognized the potential strength of the unit and (thankfully) modified it to have a weak defensive value. Other new units provided, include: a self-defending ore truck, Soviet commandos and more nukes (just what the world needs).

Aesthetically, *Counterstrike* has little new to offer and, in my opinion, pales in comparison to the original *Red Alert.* Resolution under the Windows 95 operating system attained only the standard 640x480 256 colors. Strangely, none of the scenarios contains an introductory cinematic sequence, using fully rendered .AVI files, such as those found in *Red Alert,* which added an unparalleled level of realism and player-interest to each mission.



The navigation system is attractively rendered.

Eight new battle anthems have been included which provide even greater depth to the musical repertoire. Unfortunately, the music sometimes interferes with modem play and may need to be turned off to speed redraw response times. The sound effects are standard fare, perfectly fitting the ambient qualities of each unit.

The *Counterstrike* CD-ROM contains a couple of bonuses, including 100 new multiplayer maps. The disk also contains code to run *Westwood Chat* — Westwood's new online gaming service — and a *Red Alert* Windows 95 theme pack. The theme pack contains game-related wallpaper — (with and without the logos), tiles for Windows backgrounds and some nice screensavers.

Curiously, the difficulty settings cannot be adjusted. However, most players, with practice, should be able to beat the missions, as they aren't all that troublesome. Generally, the new missions are varied, interesting and fun to play, while scrupulously maintaining the challenging level of play espoused by *Red Alert.* As an added bonus, there are several secret "ant" missions and an accompanying mini-campaign. It reminded me of an old 50s "B" movie which portrayed mutant ants, as large as trucks, running around, killing off the population.

With all of the aforementioned features, *Counterstrike* is indeed a successful add-on module. It provides veteran *Red Alert* players with a set of new missions, some additional units, neat desktop-related stuff and the ability to go head-to-head with other headstrong players. Too bad you can't start a campaign as a leader of the ants, then take out both sides' forces. Who knows, maybe Westwood will reconsider. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *In many ways, it continues on in the grand tradition of* Red Alert!

MISSES: *No manual or discussion of new units; no cutscenes prefacing new missions.*

THE LAST WORD: *Although it doesn't break any new ground, it's still well worth getting.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	24
Playability	18
Originality	3
Graphics	14
Sound & Music	6
Physical Components	5

OVERALL 70

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS, WIN 95
Developer:	Metropolis Digital Inc.	Publisher:	GT Interactive
Telephone:	(800) 305-3990	Website:	www.gtinteractive.com

Star Command: Revolution

by Robert Mayer

FROM THE DATED Max Headroom-style cyber-puppets on the game sleeve, to the boastful hyperbole splashed across the back ("More controllable units than *Command & Conquer* or *Warcraft II*"), *Star Command: Revolution* reeks of mediocrity. That the entire printed documentation sits inside the CD jewel case, leaving precious little else stored within the box, does nothing to dispel my initial impression that *Star Command: Revolution* is about as "revolutionary" as a new and improved breakfast cereal. Not that being derivative is, in and of itself, a sin; there are lots of good games that are, at heart, based upon an underlying system or approach found in other games. Being derivative *and* unimaginative, though, is staid if not boring. When melded with an ugly, if impromptu, gameface, the system takes several steps over the line into gaming oblivion.

In fairness, *Star Command: Revolution* does serve up some aspects of play that real-time gamers might find appealing. There are lots of units to control — 64 different buildings and ships, according to the marketing ploy — and four distinct races to choose from, each kitted out with a unique set of units and altogether different look. Multiplayer capability is an integral component, and most of the routine features, uncovered in a game of this sort, are familiarly set in place: experience levels for units, unit upgrades and training, cooperative or competitive multiplayer selectivity and a campaign game to boot. The game is easy to learn, having few distractions or complex assimilation-related criteria to seriously hamper play. But I have to wonder what the designers and publishers have been attending to for the last year or so, when their boastful comments include such impromptu claims as "640x480 high resolution SVGA graphics" and "group multiple ships into squadrons for fast deployment." In a rapidly maturing market, 640x480 resolution hardly qualifies as a virtue to flaunt, and grouping units together was a facet of real-time games as early as *Warcraft*.

Gameplay bore out unremarkable results. Starting with a Mothership, the player harvests various space rocks, builds new ships and structures, and, through exploration, peels back the "fog of war" shrouding the battlefield. Building a training facility can improve the technology level of individual units, but only if the units and the Mothership remain adjacent to the facility. Only the Mothership can gather resources and, therefore, requires continual safeguard from enemy attack. Unit types are quite diverse, spanning from long range precision attackers to close-range maulers. Even droids play a prominent role, assuming much the same functionality and level of importance that infantry assume in *Command & Conquer*. Unfortunately, everything is performed at an uninspiring and lackadaisical level, eventually building to an altogether apathetic crescendo.

Subtle as a starship wreck!

This impression is further reinforced by such glaring anomalies as a spacescape filled with, of all things, giant rock formations? The maps are rendered as simple 2D mazefests, cordoning off the vastness of outer space with nothing more than peculiar rock-laden cliffs. Battles typically degenerate into a cosmic free-for-all confined by this odd labyrinth. Units have trouble passing by one another, making for some massive interstellar traffic jams. Come on, folks. While this might seem acceptable in a ground-based "tank-on-tank" system of fire and maneuver, it is an utterly ridiculous concept when set against the vast expanses of outer space.

Add to this some other irritations — incredibly annoying voices, bad music, garish color schemes, saving games only at certain ill-defined intervals — and it becomes clear that *Star Command: Revolution* is neither very commanding nor revolutionary. No doubt destined for the intergalactic bargain bin, this game has very little going for it. Given the many quality real-time products already available, I doubt even the slickly worded marketing pitch will have much sway over the savvy gamer when comparing it to, say, *Warcraft 2* or *Red Alert*. Like it or not, when a game publisher puts out a real-time strategy game they'll invariably be compared to Westwood and Blizzard. If it doesn't measure up, it's time to reboot.

OK, I confess; playing real-time games isn't my favorite pastime, but I can certainly discern a high-caliber product when I see it. *Command & Conquer*, *Warcraft II* — these are eminently high-quality products; *Star Command: Revolution* doesn't come anywhere close. While it won't kill you to play it, for sheer entertainment value, you're better off scouring the clearance racks or waiting for the release of *Starcraft*. In the meantime, Comrades, you can start this revolution without me. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS:
It's easy to play.

MISSES: *Miserably fails to keep pace with its more respectable contemporaries.*

THE LAST WORD:
Falls victim to the "me-too" real-time gaming syndrome.

Ratings

Dollar Value	10
Playability	2
Originality	12
Graphics	10
Sound & Music	2
Physical Components	5

OVERALL 41

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	Electronic Arts	Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Telephone:	800-245-4525	Website:	www.ea.com

Scarab

by Shane Mooney

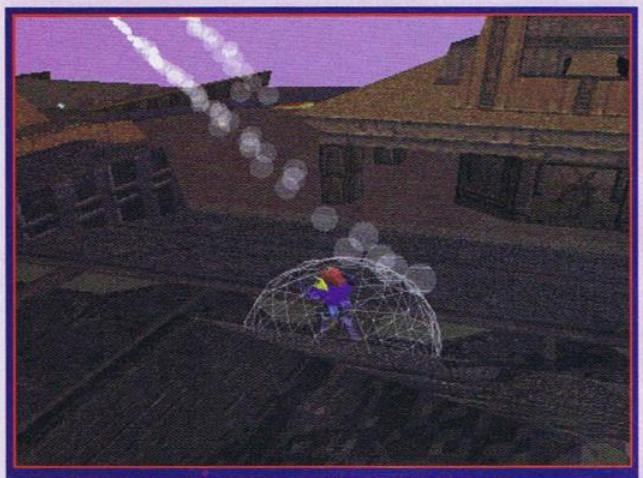
TAKE THE CLIMACTIC combat scene in the sci-fi flick, *Stargate*, mix in plenty of the first-person perspective action of *Quake*, several real-time strategy games and more missions than you can shake an Ankh at, and what you get is *Scarab*, a unique and entertaining first-person "strategy" game.

In some strange alternate reality that bears an uncanny resemblance to ancient Egypt, a war rages between Ra and Osiris. Using enormous robots, Osiris and his followers have taken control of several cities and turned their inhabitants into mindless slaves. Obviously cast as the good guy and disciple of Ra, it's up to the player to use whatever weapons and strategy are available to liberate their captured cities.

But despite using a first-person perspective to convey the action and as many as 40 weapons to choose from, *Scarab* is much more than "Duke Meets King Tut." The player's ultimate goal is to seize control of a city, which can be accomplished in one of two manners: The player can opt to take the "kill 'em all" approach, relying upon fancy gunplay to destroy each of the city's oversized robots three times to prevent them from re-generating, or the player can opt for the more "strategic" approach — erecting a network of power-generating towers over the city. Here the gamer must wrest control over most of the city from the robots for a specified period of time.

Players must select from one of three robots to carry out each mission. Each has its own peculiar advantages and disadvantages as well as a fully customizable assortment of weapons with which to do battle. For instance, the Sekhmet is slow but packs a wallop, while the Horus is faster but less lethal. Finally, the Anubis represents a happy compromise of speed and power.

The missions take place on what can be best described as a stylized portrait of Egypt. The landscape is dotted with pyramids and sky walkways, while several hovering platforms can transport the player from one end of the city to the other. As it takes place outdoors, much of the time there isn't a great deal to admire. Though the layout is organized in terms of platforms and ramps, it ain't *Duke Nukem* (or even *Quake*, for that matter). Also, the viewing window can't be resized to full-screen mode. Graphically, it's closer to about 50% of the screen, placed in the left-hand corner. While the true 3D viewing perspective is quite pleasing, players will undoubtedly experience problems obtaining really smooth game play on anything less then a Pentium 120.



The missions take place on a stylized portrait of Egypt.

Scarab contains over 140 missions to choose from: 20 missions for each of the seven cities depicted in the game. And players won't tire of things to do, even though every mission has the same end goal; capture the city. Since there are so many missions, players should practice employing various strategies — such as artillery strikes or defensive posturing — to accomplish their goal. In addition, several computer-controlled robots lumber about the city, readily assisting the player in achieving his/her goal.

Unfortunately, the missions become rather tedious after you've played through the first couple of dozen or so. While it's fun to chase after the enemy robots, leap over small structures and onto several layers of platforms in your pursuit of your quarry, it all begins to become a dreary affair with repeated play. The only aspect that seems to change between the seven cities are the number and types of robots the player must face.

Scarab becomes a more memorable experience during multiplayer sessions. There's a head-to-head mode, as well as six-player support over a local network. Even Internet-based competitions can be touched off, using either competitive or cooperative modes of play. Although the mission objectives remain the same, players can select which city they'll ravage, which weapon levels to invoke and whether they wish to duke it out during daylight or nighttime environments.

Scarab's simplistic design easily immerses the player in the system, though there just aren't enough intriguing gaming elements to maintain player interest over the course of the 140 missions. Players bored with the all-too-common "kill-until-you-find-the-exit type" of game play may wish to check this one out. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Simple yet addictive gameplay with plenty of missions.*

MISSES: *Unremarkable graphics, and with 140 missions spread out over seven cities, game play gets old quickly.*

THE LAST WORD: *Action fans craving more strategic elements may find the game worth the try.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	25
Playability	15
Originality	7
Graphics	15
Sound & Music	6
Physical Components	7

OVERALL **75**

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95 & DOS
Developer:	Cyro Interactive	Publisher:	Interplay Productions
Telephone:	(714) 553-6655	Website:	www.interplay.com

REVIEW

adventure

Versailles 1685

Intrigue at the Court of Louis XIV

by Andy Backer

VIVA LA FRANCE! Cryo Entertainment, the French development team that designed *Versailles 1685*, has cleverly created an entertaining historical adventure game, set in the palace of the "Sun King." The game successfully illustrates a typical day in the life of Louis XIV and his Court, while simultaneously requiring the player to solve a mystery. *Versailles* is an informative, entertaining and fully-realized game containing only minor shortcomings.

True to the neoclassic rule of unities, which states that all action takes place on a single day and in a single place, our saga occurs after the King wakes, goes to council, then mass, dinner, work, supper, and finally back to bed. At the beginning of the day, the gamer is given an assignment by the King's first *Valet de Chambre*, Monsieur Bontemps, who fears that a mad pamphleteer may have planted a bomb in the palace. He asks the gamer to discreetly search the palace, make inquiries, and find out whether or not there is a bomb on the premises. If he does locate a device, he must also disarm it.

Of course, a bomb is discovered, along with plenty of clues — in the form of puzzles — which are planted by the mad bomber. If the gamer can solve all the puzzles before the King's day ends, then Versailles won't erupt into flames.

The story is told in seven acts. Each act begins with an animated cut-scene illustrating the ceremonial ritual connected with that portion of the King's day. For instance, Act I depicts the King's waking ritual. A doctor delicately wakes him, then inquires about his health. A host of attendants — many royal and titled — attend to his various needs. One washes his hands while another helps him to dress. As you can see, everything follows a well-rehearsed regimen, and with good reason. In 1685, the French aristocracy was a rigid, mannered society: perfect in posture, dress and style. (Movies have never quite captured the feel of the period as effectively as this game does.)

To carry this concept further, the game is populated by a cast of dolls. Their stiff behavior accurately replicates the period's posture, dress and style, perhaps better than actors could accomplish. However, this "dolls living in a dollhouse" approach to animation may not appeal to everyone. Many dolls aren't animated at all, but only stand about in decorative positions. Those that are animated are done so on a selective basis — some arm gesticulations and a few facial expressions during conversations, and little else.

Dolls at play in the Hall of Mirrors.

The palace, however, has been recreated on a sumptuous and accurate level. In fact, walking through "Versailles" is a visual and auditory feast. Players can ogle the lavish, hi-res graphics from a first-person vantage point, all the while listening to period French Baroque music. Detail is what sets this game apart — floors are crafted in intricate parquet patterns, potted orange trees line the Hall of Mirrors and exquisite paintings adorn the walls (even the ceilings!). The gardens are equally breathtaking; even the fountains depict several of Aesop's fables!

The program adheres to a 360° freedom-of-movement system, which permits the player to look up, down and all around his or her surroundings. In addition, the player may learn more about palace protocol through an online database. Similar to a modern tour guidebook, the database provides historical information about each room and character.

The story develops in a leisurely, linear fashion, allowing players to visit only a few rooms at a time. Once the puzzles in these rooms have been solved and reported to Bontemps, more rooms can be accessed. Early on, the puzzles are fairly straightforward, but become more complex as the game progresses. The very last puzzle requires the gamer to make a sentence of 11 words, beginning with "It is not..." from a cryptogram. Although our review copy did not contain the correct method of solving this puzzle, we trust this oversight will be taken care of soon. Otherwise, this is the only flaw in an otherwise perfect adventure game. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *The palace is recreated on a stunning level, the puzzles are fair and the history lesson is entertaining as well as informative.*

MISSES: *Not everyone will enjoy or appreciate the method of animation portrayed.*

LAST WORD: *Highly recommended, especially for anyone interested in Versailles or the French neoclassic period.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	26
Playability	17
Originality	10
Graphics	19
Sound & Music	10
Physical Components	8
OVERALL	90

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	Smoking Car Prod.	Publisher:	Broderbund
Telephone:	(415) 382-4700	Website:	www.broderbund.com

Last Express

by John Withers

1914... the eve of the Great War. Nostalgia and hazy memories tend to paint the period as a simpler time, but, in actuality, nothing could be further from the truth. In Europe, paranoia, factions and nationalistic fervor all played a critical role in the conduct of secret treaties and complex regional alignments. No, although far from an innocent period, the early 1900s were decidedly more elegant, its zenith best personified with the illustrious train known as the Orient Express. This *grande dame* of rail transport ran from Paris to Constantinople, taking the cream of aristocracy and social climbers on their diplomatic and societal rounds. In Jordan Mechner's *Last Express*, the player assumes the role of a forlorn passenger, watching as the train meanders across Europe on its final if fateful journey.

As far as the journey goes, nothing develops quite the way it was originally planned. First the player inadvertently misses the train, and, left to his own devices, catches a ride with a beautiful motorcyclist who just happens to be heading off on a parallel course. In order to catch the train, the player must vault from the racing motorcycle onto the speeding train. A harrowing experience, all this pales in comparison to what's in store. Once the player is safely on board, he discovers that a friend he intended to meet has been brutally murdered. Shoving the body out a window, the player, who, naturally enough, resembles the dead man, assumes his identity.

Without so much as a clue concerning his death, the player must rely upon his wits to figure out what happened and why. Counting upon some counter-intuitive thinking, the player, among other things, rapidly unravels the victim's past. In time, a complicated plot emerges which eventually points to how and, more importantly, why he was murdered.

The Player attempts to discover why his friend was killed.

Smoking Car Productions, the creators of *Last Express*, have done their utmost to set the tone and atmospheric high points of both the period and the Orient Express. Instead of using standard full-motion video (FMV) for the acting segments, *Last Express* employs a stylized *art nouveau* sense of design, depicting the actors in solid-filled animations. According to the design team, this approach was brought on by two factors: Animations take less CD storage space, and the style and type of art used fit in well with the period.

> **"Last Express *presents* *a* COMPELLING, *unambiguous story line.*"**

Cynics might conclude that storage space and associated costs ultimately drove this design decision, although after playing the game, this assumption becomes readily unfounded. The excellent portrayal of facial expression and movement — even within the rather slow frame rate format — makes it obvious that real actors were filmed and then rotoscoped into animations, probably escalating, rather than reducing, production costs. The animated characters blend in perfectly with the sumptuous background, creating an excellent visceral appearance, which obviates any need for high speed 3D renderings or FMV cutscenes.

True to tradition, the train, though, takes center stage. The designers spent almost a year carefully documenting the period and the train, lovingly detailing every aspect and facet of the era. While the Orient Express no longer exists as a viable means of commuting, the designers went to great pain and effort to locate some similar railway cars (one was situated in Athens, Greece) in order to help them build accurate and faithful renditions of the railway cars.

Their labors pay off handsomely. The look and feel of the smoking car is remarkable, while the player's compartment and other sections of the train are astounding and evocative. Much of the actual train was handcrafted, lavishly adorned in polished woods, gleaming metals and opulent woven carpets. Admirably, *Last Express* captures the mood, experience and flavor right down to the brass fittings. Quite frankly, I'd be surprised if a more

accurate rendition of the Express actually exists today.

Although the detailed graphics establish much of the natural allure of *Last Express*, the captivating sound effects play an equally integral role in the game's overall feel and texture. Chief among these are the distinctive voices employed by each of the actors, who were selected specifically for their distinct physical attributes. These allow the player to make quick and readily distinguishable inferences about each of the animated characters.

Since the passenger list is composed of several foreign nationals, the designers had to elicit a sense of international flavor. Lexicons include various dialects, tempered with English subtitles; this facilitates play, while evoking a charming cosmopolitan quality. Period music was alsc developed which again fills a critical void. The music, some times delivered by the charac ters, has a haunting, etherea quality which heightens the mood and provides a dramati flair and sense of foreboding The sounds of the train, too, a ingly conveyed. The odd noises and rythmic quality neatly fades into the background — the typical player won't even notice them until they cease.

Pacing takes an especially delicate magnitude in *Last Express*. The plot follows the schedule of the actual Orient Express, which, as the player will discover, plays a pivotal factor in determining the outcome of the game. A clock appears in the lower right hand portion of the screen. By depressing the timepiece, players can stop the game at any point, saving, or even rewinding, the story to replay, if they so choose, a mismanaged sequence of events.

A map depicting the various train stops is situated behind the time screen. At first, this map appears to have been included as a decoration. As the story unfolds, it becomes all too apparent that it is fastidiously tracing the train's path along its entire route. Like the clock feature, players can click on an already visited city in order to rewind events.

Some episodes are time-sensitive. For instance, in one city, police will board the train looking for someone connected with another crime. Unless the player performs the proper actions, he or she will be arrested for a crime they obviously didn't commit.

However, while time plays a trenchant role in determining some actions, game play is heavily influenced by the characters' actions. Oddly, much of the game is based upon character interaction taking effect with, and sometimes without, the player's involvement. The plot itself moves forward even without certain inputs provided by the player. Evidently, the NPCs onboard follow some randomly determined actions and prescripted routines. The player, then, is inserted into this complex web, becoming another character along for the ride. A player's actions can influence the story, triggering certain events to occur earlier han otherwise planned or, in ome cases, alter their outome totally. This curious fact resents a perplexing chalenge. The player must ascerain what exactly is going on, nterpreting each event and ow they fit into the complex as possible.

While the mechanical elements and craftsmanship make for a great adventure, *Last Express* stows away a few curious conundrums. First, while not as puzzle-laden as some titles, the game does have its fair share of complicated cryptographic episodes. Some of these puzzles are rather unintuitive and somewhat randomly determined. Equally disturbing — though not necessarily a fault — are the lack of options available in the solving of puzzles. Although it appears as if there are several different ways of solving certain puzzles, players must make the right moves in the right order to advance. Someday it would be nice if a game designer came up with a truly object-oriented environment, where processing events in a logical manner invoked more than just a knee-jerk reaction.

The game nearly derails when it comes to slow frame rates — providing something on the magnitude of one or two frames per second. Fortunately, *Last Express* performs decently, fading one frame unto another in an artful, storytelling manner. Alas, when players try to navigate from one end of the train to the other, this technique can get old pretty quick.

Likewise, the slower-than-molasses frame rate occasionally degrades play, especially when players are trying to catch up with an NPC in order to talk to them.

Police are looking for criminals — watch out!

Since the game proceeds with or without the help of the player, it falls upon the player to locate and converse with the various NPCs. Due to the object-oriented character model, the characters you need to speak with wander around the train, conducting business with or without the player's interactions. In many cases, the player will only have the opportunity of talking with people in the train's corridors.

Equally unpleasant are the interactive combat sequences. While apparently meant to serve as a break from the slow, puzzle-based pace, combat aspects, especially under the duress of slow animation sequences, are too difficult. I successfully got through most of the combat sequences not by skill but, I hazard to say, by fortuitous opportunity. A fatal flaw to be sure.

While blemishes exist, *Last Express* presents a compelling, unambiguous, story line, adorned with all the accurate visual and aural charm befitting a fatalistic historical adventure. For train aficionados and history buffs, followers of Agatha Christie "whodunits" or anyone desiring a demonstrative experience, *Last Express* steams out from the adventure gaming station like none before it. CGC

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Stunning historical detail, excellent graphics, acting and sound.*

MISSES: *Combat aspects fail while the game exhibits a frustratingly low frame rate.*

LAST WORD: *While not without a flaw or two, this is an exciting ride from start to finish.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	25
Playability	18
Originality	10
Graphics	20
Sound & Music	10
Physical Components	8

OVERALL 91

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS, WIN 95
Developer:	Andrew Spencer	Publisher:	Psygnosis
Telephone:	(415) 655-8000	Website:	www.psygnosiscom

Ecstatica 2

by Andy Backer

THE YEAR IS 931 AD. More than three years have passed since our hero left his ancestral castle. Of the many adventures he has already encountered, none has been quite so fateful as that which occurred in the accursed village of Tirich, where he rescued the enchanted Ecstatica....

In *Ecstatica*, the hero discovered that the young woman of the same name was experiencing twisted dreams, turning Tirich into a nightmarish abode of demons and monsters. One of the impressive features of the game was its ruling metaphor, which suggests that demons may exist inside all of us and that an individual's nightmares can affect everyone around him or her. When the hero rescues Ecstatica, he in fact saves a society.

Ecstatica 2 continues the hero's adventures, if not the metaphor. Our gallant savior has fallen in love with Ecstatica and intends to make her his bride. Unfortunately, while they are returning to his castle, demons snatch her away from him, leaving him unconscious and locked in stocks. A wise priestess releases him, thereby allowing him to retake the castle and free his betrothed from the demonic hordes. The priestess avails him of another task, requiring him to restore a holy seal before creation itself comes to an end. In addition, she wants him to destroy the infernal alliance of a Warlock, a Sorceress, a Wizard, a Necromancer and an Archmage who have broken the seal.

Ecstatica 2 exhibits some unique features not incorporated in the prequel. Each time the hero collects a piece of the seal, one of his physical attributes — life energy, strength or magic energy — is increased. Although a role-playing element, it doesn't turn the game into a CRPG, as the game still places heavy emphasis on action-oriented aspects.

Spectacular graphics such as this fill the game.

The hero begins the game with some skill in both armed and unarmed combat. Eventually, the player masters each, even learning magic as the game progresses. His unarmed combat skills include punches (which open unlocked doors, cupboards and trunks), kicks, swipes, sweeps, rolls, flips, swimming, climbing ladders and jumps. Armed combat adds stabbing routines to his repertoire. There's a variety of nonmagical weapons — the best of them being the Gold Sword. Magic, whether it's found or called upon by the hero's energy, enables the player to cast fireballs or smart bombs. Once the magical energy of a weapon is expended, though, the object becomes useless.

"It provides the added satisfaction of enacting plenty of battles and performing DEATH-DEFYING STUNTS."

The game also includes several lengthy and complicated puzzles which employ locked gates and doors, but players will spend most of their time attempting to defeat the 60 different types of monsters. Other than the priestess, the villagers and the fairies, all of the creatures in the game are hostile — although touching a fairy does restore life energy. Most of the creatures can be attacked using a stabbing weapon, but a few must only be tackled from a distance, by using magic or a magical wand.

Dead monsters often spawn objects such as potions, scrolls or keys. What each potion does depends on its color — for instance, yellow potions restore life energy. Scrolls create different strengths of magical energy and, like potions, differ depending on their color. Keys, on the other hand, unlock doors located within the immediate area.

I'd rather fly Quantas.

Saving and reloading the game is critical because your hero dies so many times. As you might expect, the monsters take their toll, but many hero-related deaths occur owing to falls. Your hero mustn't run along twisting staircases, because he's likely to turn a corner too quickly, and plummet several stories to his death. Of course, errant booby traps don't help matters, either.

All told, there are 12 types of treasure of varying value. Taking treasure also helps to restore life energy. The more valuable the item, the more life energy restored. Once a player has collected 30,000 points worth of treasure, s/he can replenish all of the hero's life energy by pressing the <F12> key.

Crystal balls are usually found near pieces of the holy seal, close to the members of the quirky quintet (the Archmage and his friends). When lit, touching a crystal ball will conjure up an apparition of the wise priestess, who will hint at what the hero must do next. When a player locates an unlit ball, it means there is some task the hero must still carry out, such as killing a certain monster or collecting a particular item. The crystals interspersed throughout the game also serve as graphical guideposts.

There are switches in the form of gargoyle heads that can be activated only after the hero completes certain tasks. For example, a magic rod at the top of the prison tower is needed to open the main gate in the courtyard. Picking it up activates a pair of gargoyle heads at the base of the tower. When the gargoyles are stabbed or kicked, the left one opens a gate nearby, while the other activates another gargoyle located above the stable, beside the gate to the room.

An assortment of unlit icons are on the inventory screen, indicating those items the hero can store. They include a replica of the holy seal divided into seven pieces, armor, and eight other icons needed to pass through various doors or defeat certain enemies. When an item is found, its icon is highlighted for the remainder of the game. The wise priestess will often hint at which items can be discovered and where they can be located.

Ecstatica 2 is ten times larger than its prequel. It's also a more challenging game, with tougher battles and more difficult puzzles. Critics loved *Ecstatica's* graphics, even though they were rendered in less-defining VGA resolution. Overall, the sequel's graphics and sound track are extraordinary to behold. *Ecstatica 2's* graphics are even more detailed, rendered spectacularly in SVGA. The camera views are cinematic and are constantly changing — zooming in and out for close-up, mid-range or distant shots.

It's a game with a lot of balls. In *Ecstatica*, developer Andrew Spencer used ellipsoids — rounded elongated spheres — to create polygonally generated 3D environments, more realistic and less angular than those seen in the *Alone in the Dark* series. Unfortunately for *Ecstatica*, his animated characters still resembled a series of Spaldings, meticulously strung together. Arms and legs askew, a character often bulged in several different directions before taking his or her first step forward. The bizarre sequences were unintentionally hilarious — so Spencer decided to use twice as many ellipsoids per character in *Ecstatica 2* to make their movements more lifelike and less humorous.

The game, as a whole, is less satiric. Bodies are still strewn about, but their presence isn't as chilling or macabre this time around. It could be because these bodies aren't depicted in severely tortured or mutilated conditions, a source of much nervous laughter in *Ecstatica*. Bathroom humor, as exemplified by the flatulent, drunken bear, has also been done away with. Maybe that's because the writers are a tad older and take their work more seriously.

Some features that were irritating in *Ecstatica* have been carried forward — among them, the number of weapons laying around which still can't be picked up. The manual suggests that it's because these weapons are broken. They don't look broken, but whatever the case, it's frustrating having to check out all of the bogus weapons contained within the game. The good news is that most of the usable objects glow or intermittently flash. Another frustrating point is the lack of inventory space for weapons, keys and potions. As new weapons are found, older weapons must be discarded.

These minor quibbles aside, *Ecstatica 2* is, above all, a resplendent action adventure game. Even *Tomb Raider* can't diminish its luster. The game's graphics and soundtrack are grandiose, its animations are smooth and of special importance, it provides the added satisfaction of enacting plenty of battles and performing death-defying stunts. Bravo!

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Better graphics (SVGA) and sound, larger game, more battles.*

MISSES: *Red herring weapons, lack of inventory space, less satiric.*

LAST WORD: *A resplendent action adventure game. Even* Tomb Raider *can't diminish its luster.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	26
Playability	16
Originality	8
Graphics	20
Sound & Music	10
Physical Components	10

OVERALL 90

adventure

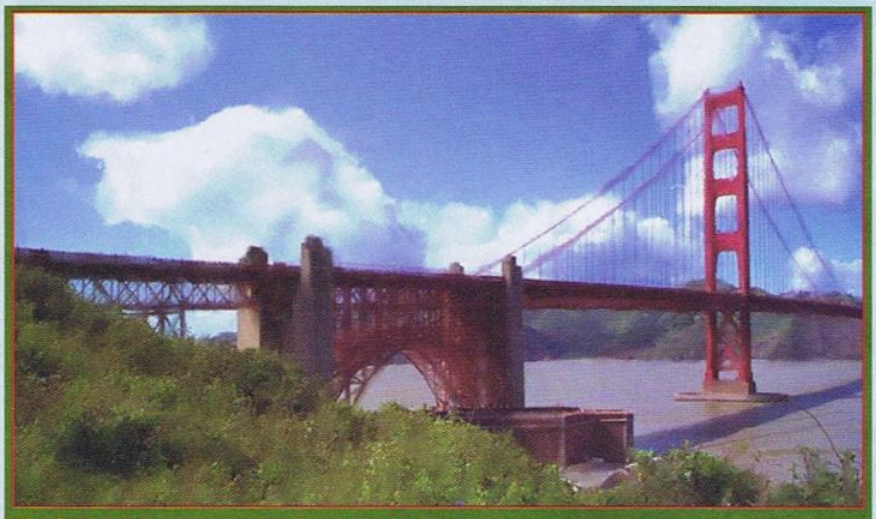
REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	Ix Entertainment	Publisher:	Panasonic Interactive
Telephone:	(408) 653-1890	Website:	www.goldengategame.com

Golden Gate

by Caroline Crawford

THE CITY BY THE BAY is a microcosm in contrast. It has inspired many a writer and musician with its beauty yet, shrouded in foggy mystique, the same arched span that greets millions of visitors has served as the locale for numerous suicides and murders. Her streets have witnessed great adventures; the so-called gold rush of 1849, the political turmoil marked by the state's Proclamation of Insurrection in 1851, and compelling human drama, such as the devastating earthquake of 1906. Truth often sojourning stranger than fiction, San Francisco provides the perfect backdrop for *Golden Gate*, Panasonic Interactive Media's graphic adventure that twists these disparate historical events and more into a fantastical plot.



This bridge is the gateway to adventure and intrigue.

Golden Gate installs with ease, recognizing and accommodating most common hardware configurations. Commenting upon installation may seem trite, but this game is one of the precious few entries that has the common sense not to alienate the mainstream audience with an intimidating set up. Getting started is also self-explanatory, thanks to a simple inventory interface and a smart navigation cursor that indicates both the directions in which the player may move and when an object may be manipulated or taken. Close locations — or those already visited — can be reached by clicking their icons on the map. New destinations, though, can only be accessed by following street signs posted along the way. There are a few locations — such as those on Angel Island — where walking about is much more difficult, but these prove to be the exception rather than the rule.

It's clear from the outset that a great deal of thought and imagination went into the cosmetic presentation of this game. San Francisco is stylistically portrayed, employing digitized photographs which are subsequently run through a watercolor filter. For the most part, this technique works well, adding to the timeless nature of the story and lending a false sense of tranquility to the menacing events that occur. On the downside, it results in a certain visual inconsistency, as players transcend locations. Some sites, such as Golden Gate Park, translate beautifully in watercolor, while others look like fuzzy tourist-captured photographs. The soft imaging approach, when mixed with the static nature of the environment, shines a harsh spotlight on the animated elements. Animation is sparse and awkwardly interspersed, failing to match the caliber of its accompanying backdrop.

It's clear that a great deal of* THOUGHT AND IMAGINATION *went into the cosmetics.

The same care and attention to detail has been lavished on the sound effects. Each game location delivers its own accompanying theme, reflecting the townfolk who once inhabited the locale or the role they play in the story. The scores are continuously drawn from the CD, which occasionally slows the action, though not enough to be considered a flaw. The sound effects are few yet intriguingly appropriate, from the cry of the gulls flying over the bay to the wind driven flags flapping in the breeze.

Golden Gate opens on a poignant note, as the player encounters a curious, yet unfamiliar character by the name of Jake. Jake calls upon the player to hunt for, of all things, an ancient treasure buried under the streets of San Francisco. The search kicks off in the prestigious Pacific Heights section of the city. Your self-appointed guide relates the strange tale of an early twentieth century newspaper man who, seeking the very same riches, succumbed to greed, which led ultimately to him unleashing his wrath on family and fellow citizens. While the narrative is clever, there are far too few clues provided.

At several points, the once-intuitive nature of the game is undermined by a seemingly convoluted plot. The story attempts to weave together fact, fiction and several diametrically opposed eras. Scenarios include: an eighteenth-century princess trying to regain her family heirlooms and become reunited with her

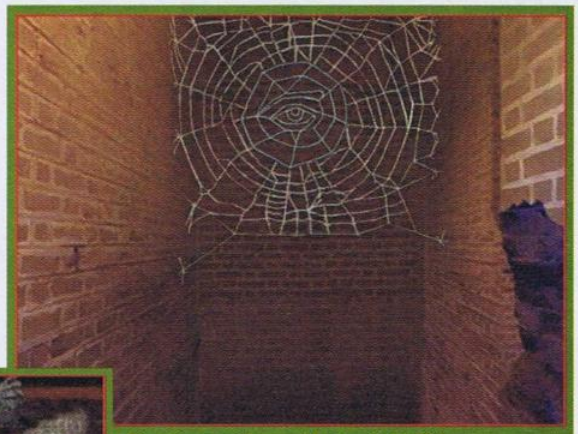
father (the rightful king of Caledon), the morally outraged Vigilante Committee of the mid-nineteenth century, and a military doctor's obsession with an insane patient at the threshold of World War II. Each of these scenarios is bound together with a smattering of Egyptology, while utilizing a degree of paganism for good measure.

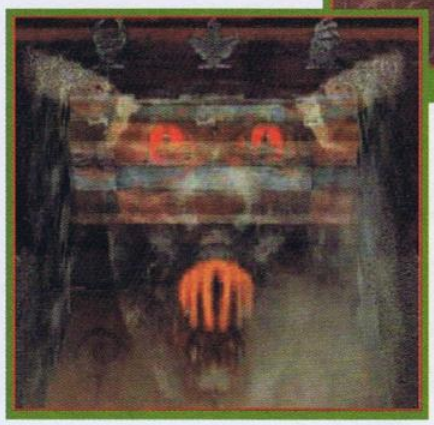
Golden Gate is designed as a nonlinear experience — in theory, at least. As with most story-driven games, there is one ultimate outcome. The majority of the locations can be visited at any time and in any order. However, there is a sequence in which the plot will unravel in a more logical fashion. It is, unfortunately, a matter of luck whether the player selects the destinations in a predetermined order. For instance, the sole clue for one puzzle is located at an altogether unrelated site. The end result is that players will find it confusing about where to go and what to look for. The most frustrating example of this is the video sequence at the Drussard residence — the first stop in the game.

The necklace, required to view the clip, is located elsewhere which, in the best case scenario, would be the second stop on the trek. If the necklace is retrieved and the player has returned to the Drussard house, they are treated to a flashback depicting the whereabouts of a puzzle — a puzzle they would probably have found during their first visit.

Players can't count on getting a lot of help from strangers either, since the brief encounters with Jake are the only human contact in this lonesome quest. That's not to say there aren't plenty of characters within the game. The player is introduced to a number of them, and can outline their thoughts by the means of a series of letters, journals and flash-back video segments. This, then, opens the door for the most annoying element of *Golden Gate*. The designers tried to breathe life into the characters through documented revelations. For example, to illustrate their point about man progressively going mad, the designers employed a series of continually wandering journal entries. The player, then, must suffer along, reading page after endless page of melodramatic ramblings, hunting for a single clue which will lead him or her forward.

No graphic adventure would be complete without puzzles, and *Golden Gate* certainly doesn't shirk its cryptographic responsiblity. There are nine puzzles in total — all of which are neatly threaded throughout the story — comfortably melding the puzzle-bound elements with the essence of the game. As mentioned earlier, clues for each of these conundrums are found scattered within the quest, but, in most cases, these clues will only work if the puzzle has never been touched. Several of the puzzles may be too difficult for the average player to solve. Moreover, *Golden Gate* will likely appeal to a veteran gamer, as there is no online help provided or cheat bypass features to facilitate play. Luckily, each puzzle has at least one tried-and-true solution, so tenacious gamers should be able to eventually emerge victorious.





Pleasing graphics add an artistic flair.

Machines sporting the minimum system requirements may experience difficulty with the full-motion video portions of the game. The vignettes which drive the story are letterboxed and play smoothly, but the segments introducing Jake are played in full-screen mode. Therefore, they may play unintelligibly on some machines, since minimizing video playback portions has sadly been omitted. This reviewer used a Pentium 100 with 16 MB of RAM and 2 MB of VRAM, and still encountered problems with two of the full-screen episodes.

There are Easter eggs and handsome rewards included throughout the game. *Golden Gate's* pleasing graphics add an especially artistic flair and source of pride to the story. It's a sheer joy to visit the game's familiar City by the Bay locales, including Chinatown, Fisherman's Wharf and Mission Dolores. My personal favorite — the Cliff House's Museum Mechanique — is a must-see for anyone interested in the evolution of the arcade. Additionally, the designers have supplemented the experience with intriguing little extras, such as the historical video of a jaunt down Market Street and the jukebox feature, which permits players to enjoy the ambient soundtrack.

These criteria aside, *Golden Gate* may not represent as magical an experience as some might expect. It seems to get caught up in that difficult gaming vortex, which lack the action and interactivity that appeals to the true game enthusiast. Furthermore, it requires more adventure gaming experience than the typical novice player may possess. If it's a quirky, intelligent, low-key adventure you're looking for, *Golden Gate* may span your tastebuds. However, if you are waiting for the next leap forward in graphic adventure games, *Golden Gate* may not be your idea of the next wonder of the world. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Watercolor graphics, simple interface and the intermingling of San Francisco history throughout the plot.*

MISSES: *Bad still-frame animation, lack of character interaction, convoluted story line, and absent playback options or help features.*

LAST WORD: Golden Gate *is an interesting way to see the sights if you're in the mood for mild amusement, but a trip to the real city is sure to be more fulfilling.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	21
Playability	12
Originality	8
Graphics	16
Sound & Music	8
Physical Components	7

OVERALL 72

Counterpoint

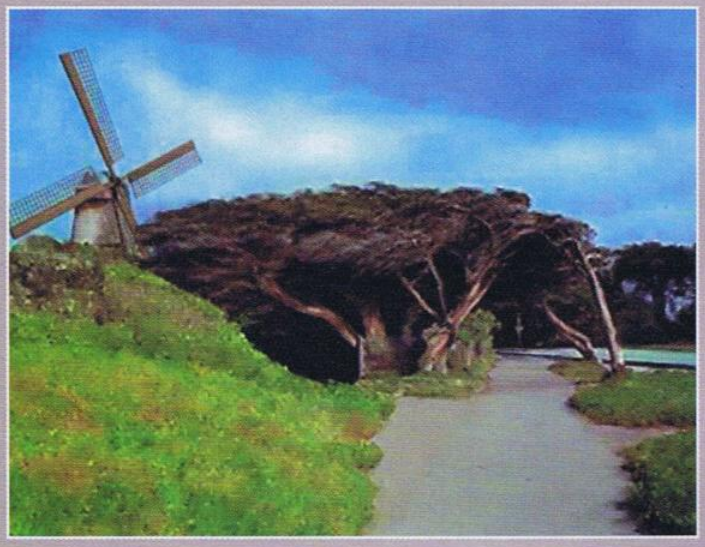
A rebuttal to Golden Gate review

by Alex Kazim,
President & CEO,
Ix Entertainment

Thank you for taking the time to review *Golden Gate,* and for the positive comments throughout the article. In designing the title, we wanted to create a unique gaming experience, where every facet of the game, from the watercolor art to the custom game engine, offered something new and interesting. Ms. Crawford's thoughtful comments reinforce our belief that we have accomplished just that.

In the article, however, I noticed a number of potentially misleading statements that I would like to clarify. Furthermore, I would like to address Ms. Crawford's frustrations as mentioned in the review.

First, the review suggests that the watercolor art was created with the help of an automated watercolor "filter." This is far from the truth. Each watercolor image was processed for gameplay clarity; that is, extraneous detail from nonessential objects was removed using dynamic amounts of the watercolor effect. In addition, the perspective lines in each image were carefully treated to preserve both the illusion of a virtual environment as well as the watercolor look. These decisions can only be made by a human hand, and while the use of digital tools lessened the complexity of the task, the artists invested over 600 hours manually processing the watercolors. In an industry that is infested with clone-makers, *Golden Gate's* art shows that differentiation is still something which we should all strive for.



Second, the article references the lack of clues at the start of the game. Unfortunately, Ms. Crawford only had an excerpt of "Jake's Diary," a 30-page hard copy journal included in the packaging. The journal provides more information on the treasure and the treasure hunter that greets you at the start of the game. We apologize if this was unclear in the marketing materials that accompanied the reviewer's guide.

Third, the review states that the clues in the game will only work if the puzzles have never been touched. This is incorrect; the clues in the game will work at any time. We can only surmise that the reviewer mistook the clues in the "Reviewers Guide" for the clues in the game. If that is the case, we again apologize for not being more clear.

While subjective opinions are always difficult to rebut, I believe I can address some of the frustrations that Ms. Crawford encountered. First, the review expressed concern over the nonlinearity of the hunt with respect to the inherent linearity of an interactive story. Our customer research concluded that players in this genre were frequently frustrated when their exploration enjoyment was suddenly halted by the necessity of solving puzzles. With this in mind, we made a conscious decision to create a title where the player is free to explore 90% of the world. While this decision may seem to create a convoluted storyline, we believe it will prove successful in the long run.

Second — and related to the linearity issue, the reviewer expressed frustration at the sequence of events in the game, pointing a finger at one of the video flashbacks that reference a child's puzzle. Contrary to Ms. Crawford's conclusion, the flashback exists to provide information on what's in the puzzle, as opposed to the puzzle itself. Again, our focus groups found that most players did not have a problem with this sequence.

Third — regarding the diary and journal passages, it is especially difficult to rebut an opinion that so eloquently referred to the prose as "melodramatic ramblings." Of this, I can only say that this text was written by Patrick Clark, a professional fiction writer, with undergraduate and graduate degrees in Creative Writing from Rice University and the University of Arizona. In addition to having had his plays performed and short stories published, Mr. Clark's work has been praised by leading writers in the field, including the acclaimed short story writer and Pulitzer nominee, Lee K. Abbot. We stand behind the quality and effectiveness of the prose, especially given the inherent limitations of text in adventure games.

Finally, your review is correct in its assessment that *Golden Gate's* audience lies between the gaming enthusiast and the novice — but rather than a no-man's land, I believe this to be a sweet spot in the market. While most computer games target the "Early Adopter" market segment, this title is targeted at the larger "Early Majority," the same segment that was responsible for the overwhelming success of *MYST* and *7th Guest.* I believe our emphasis on exploration and story, the innovations in gameplay, and of course, a unique look and feel, will make it a perfect match for these consumers.

These issues aside, I would again like to thank you for the feedback in your review. As *Golden Gate* is our first product, we are thrilled with the positive comments that we have received from *Computer Game Entertainment* and other magazines, and we look forward to applying your insight to our future products. CGE

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS & WIN 95
Developer:	Simbiosis Interactive	Publisher:	Sirtech Software
Telephone:	(315) 393-6451	Website:	www.sir-tech.com

REVIEW

adventure

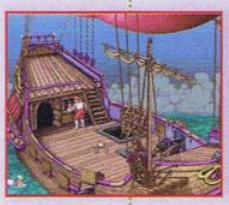
Fable

by Andy Backer

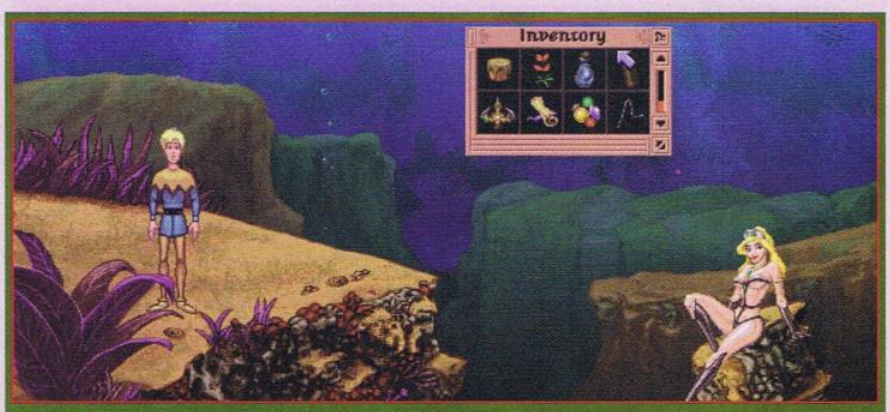
CONTRARY TO WHAT ONE might expect, *Fable* isn't a cute little allegory about strange lore or Aesop's tales. It's an animated graphic adventure, heavily influenced by Sierra's popular *King's Quest* series.

In short, *Fable* is about a young man who has embarked on a quest to find some magic jewels. Going by the name of Quickthorpe, our protagonist is an unlikely hero — reluctant of mind, skinny of build. He has been chosen by his village to scour the realms of ice, mist, water and fire-slaying monsters if need be, and ultimately tasked to return with the sacred jewels.

On the positive side, the game installs quickly and requires little in the way of hard disk space. *Fable* opens on a very attractive note as amusingly animated characters frolic across lush, richly detailed hi-res backgrounds. Aurally, the game is equally convincing — replete with bubbling brooks and thriving forest-based wildlife. The early graphics, economical plot line, intriguing puzzles and whimsical characters lull the unsuspecting gamer into thinking he or she is playing a truly wonderful game. But *Fable* isn't all that it aspires to be — essentially it's an above-average game competing against more capable titles. After the first few highly entertaining scenes, the game degenerates into a short string of repetitious encounters, unevenly designed puzzles and a story that's heavy on jokes and light on plot. Instead of fully developing any of its characters, *Fable* chooses to briefly parade a host of shallow caricatures across the gaming screen.



In spite of its flashy graphic and interface-based similarities to the *King's Quests* series, *Fable* is imitative. It regurgitates the same old gaming formulas, instead of surprising the player with new, eventful twists. There are mazes in the *King's Quests* game, so *Fable* follows suit. *King's Quest* quests players to embark upon scavenger hunts, so *Fable* performs in like fashion.



Happily, he's found a way of breathing underwater.

Roberta Williams, lead designer on the *King's Quest* series, always sought to make each new iteration somehow different from its predecessor, surprising the player with such innovative devices as full-bore musical productions. There are no such accompanying production numbers in *Fable*. Instead, there are scantily dressed women which our young hero leers at as he asks them to disrobe and join him in a skinny dip. (I found this adult-oriented humor oddly refreshing and innovative.) Players should be forewarned that they may find some of the language contained in the game vulgar, if not offensive.

Other features include a stylized interface, that uses the left button to perform various game-related actions. Conversely, the right mouse button is used to switch the iconically-driven cursor between talking and taking, walking and using. There's a resizable (and movable) inventory window plus close-ups of important objects, areas and speaking characters. Some clever spot animation makes the game seem fully animated, although it's not. For example, when Quickthorpe talks to the village elder, the focal point shifts to a close-up of the elder's face, complete with eyebrows and an animated pair of lips synchronized to the speech. When it's Quickthorpe's turn to speak, we again witness the same weird close-up. Meanwhile, both close-ups are superimposed over a completely static background bereft of animation, save a flowing stream of water, some arm gestures and perhaps a tiny flock of birds winging their way across the sky. An animator should be a magician and dazzle us with an illusory effect, instead of just tweaking a few hot spots on the screen.

Fable may appeal to gamers who are content to snatch up yet another *King's Quest* clone, or to players new to the genre. In spite of its marred imagery, *Fable's* still better than average and deserves more than a double-take. But, as far as I was concerned, "been there, done that." CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS:
The graphics are particularly remarkable and include lush, detailed hi-res backgrounds.

MISSES:
An innovative game, it's not.

LAST WORD:
In spite of its flaws, it's a better than average animated adventure.

Ratings

Dollar Value	26
Playability	16
Originality	7
Graphics	17
Sound & Music	8
Physical Components	8

OVERALL 82

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS, WIN 3.1 & 95
Developer:	Marcia Bales	Publisher:	Sierra On-Line
Telephone:	(206) 649-9800	Website:	www.sierra.com

Shivers Two: Harvest of Souls

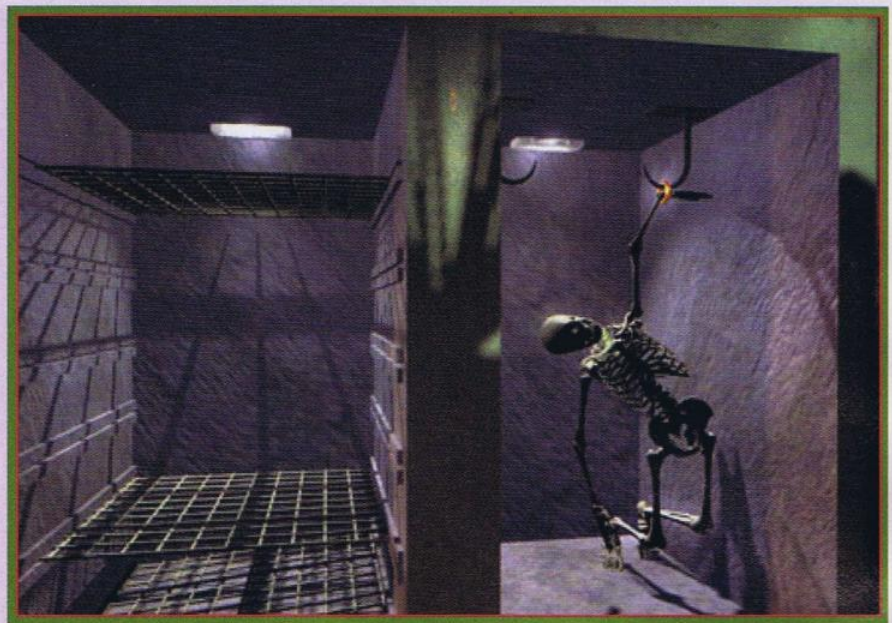
by Andy Backer

SHIVERS TWO: *Harvest of Souls*, is, as you might have guessed, the follow-up to the highly acclaimed *Shivers*, which assumed cult-like status, due primarily to its high quality puzzles, music and artwork. In contrast, *Shivers Two* should more than satisfy the first crop of fans as well as attract legions of ardent new followers.

The sequel is bigger and better in virtually every way possible. It features even more startling, highly-detailed, surrealistic 3D graphic environments, which can be seen from sweeping 360° panoramic viewpoints. It also includes eerie, directional sound effects and a dynamic, clue-filled, alternative-rock sound track. It has over fifty nightmarishly contrived puzzles, a convenient map, which allows the gamer to jump from location to location, and the return of "flashback," a replay feature that rescues the player from any copious note-taking. These are all amazing improvements, but what is most impressive about the new *Shivers* tale is its complex and richly detailed ghost story.

Marcia Bales, the designer of both *Shivers* and *Shivers Two*, enjoys telling a good ghost story. In her scariest tale yet, the gamer pays a visit to Cyclone, a bizarre little town located in a remote corner of Arizona, to visit a few rock-band friends who are producing music videos. The player quickly discovers that Cyclone is deserted and his or her friends have mysteriously vanished. Apart from a few coded messages encrypted in a video they sent, little else is known about their whereabouts.

Like its predecessor, *Shivers Two* is based on an intriguing mixture of fact and myth. In the prequel, the main physical task for the gamer was to capture several dangerous and demon-like Ixupi, then place them in their proper pots. *Shivers Two* is similarly constructed, but the main physical task this time is to find 12 bahos or "prayer sticks" and place them on an altar within a sacred kiva. The first bahos is hidden within a kachina doll, a kind of spirit messenger that sits on the motel office desk. Elaborate puzzles guard the other sticks.



What's in the food locker.

> **"A SPINE-TINGLING *combination of ancient curse and* MODERN MYSTERY."**

Another diabolical twist is that although the player (a.k.a. Warrior) may hold a bahos, until it is actually placed in the altar, the player's character loses life essence. To make it even more interesting, Devil's Canyon, where the kiva is hidden, is guarded by petroglyphs that shoot life-draining fireballs. The player must note the symbol on the kachina containing the bahos, travel through the canyon then find the matching symbol on a canyon wall. The player must then solve a tangram in order to enter the kiva and place the bahos in its matching slot on the altar.

A mysterious figure called Darkcloud secretly watches the player's progression, rewarding him or her by means of cryptic telephone calls or notes. It is also Darkcloud who has left the puzzles, kachinas and prayer sticks for the player to find. One of the player's objectives is to unravel Darkcloud's secret identity. There is also a white-clad apparition included to help the player along the way. More often than not, however, this confused ghost hinders progress rather than helps. Primary sources for game clues are the rock videos created by the player's friends, which are still being broadcast on the televisions in town. Unfortunately, all of these TVs are also

The missing rock-band.

rigged to drain life essence and need to be altered before they can be turned on.

Virtually all of the settings utilize technology that the gamer can access for clues, including: TVs, answering machines, computers, radios and telephones. Moreover, there are loads of letters, articles, clippings and photos attached to or slipped into various bulletin boards, walls and dresser drawers. Be advised that inventory items are hidden not only in cabinets, crates, and boxes, but under automobile hoods and inside ovens, too.

The game is only partially nonlinear. There is no particular order for the gamer to follow while exploring the town, but the first prayer stick must be placed before any of the others can be found. In addition, the player must locate the chessboard before any chess pieces appear. Furthermore, the "Candy Cane Dragon" and "Get a Grip" rock videos must be viewed before the player can solve two of the game's puzzles. Three prayer sticks must be placed before "Move without Thought" is available and "Know Your Enemy" becomes obtainable only after a torn paper puzzle is solved.

The game map only allows the player to jump to places already explored, but it speeds up the game considerably and should be included in every other adventure and role-playing game. It's so much easier for the player to go back to Devil's Canyon after they've already visited it.

Puzzles in the original *Shivers* game ranged in difficulty from one to ten. There aren't any extremely easy or extremely difficult puzzles to solve in *Shivers Two*, which range in difficulty from three to eight. Over half of the puzzles are tangrams — a small group of geometric figures — and none require arcade skills. A tangram may include triangles, rectangles and rhomboids that can be combined to form a number of different shapes. There are also a number of scavenger hunt puzzles of the "find-the-key-to-open-the-door" variety.

Three completely different endings are possible, but only one ends up becoming the optimal conclusion. The player has to make some quick decisions, and if he or she makes an unwise move, the world changes drastically right before the player's eyes. If the player chooses correctly, the rock band achieves life, fame and fortune to boot.

This is one of the more surreal rooms in town.

How good is *Shivers Two*? It's very nearly a great game. As a graphic adventure, its sounds and graphics are state-of-the-art, and it visually stands up to any other graphic adventure on the market. It also has a superior sound track; its rock videos are superb. The player won't find a more memorable story, either. Visiting Cyclone is an unforgettable experience, and as a puzzle adventure, *Shivers Two* is much better than the pure puzzle adventures featured in games such as *7th Guest*. Its puzzles are well-integrated, while retaining a more complex and dramatic storyline. However, some of its puzzles aren't logically wired into the system; these stand out as odd inclusions for the sake of puzzle solving. As such, they interrupt the flow of the story while weakening its plausibility. For example, the tangrams associated with the canyon wall symbols should have at least appeared as if they were part of the canyon wall. It would've been less a leap of faith, obviating any need to wonder how putting geometric figures together would mechanically trigger a door to open. As a result, the pop-up tangrams don't visually appear as if they are part of the scenery. Some of the prayer sticks puzzles aren't well integrated, and fail to logically fit into the story as well as the chess puzzle does.

Shivers Two will appeal mostly to adventure gamers who love to solve a variety of jigsaw, tangram, chess, card, geometric and arithmetic puzzles. In addition to being a suspenseful, well-told murder mystery, *Shivers Two* is an intriguing introduction to the Anasazi Indian culture of the American Southwest. Now, throw in the really cool rock videos and a dozen eccentric characters, and ask yourself "why" or "how" a whole town of people could suddenly disappear, and you've got more than enough reasons for spending long, gleeful nights obsessively playing this spine-tingling combination of ancient curse and modern mystery. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *The game is superior to its prequel in all aspects. It has the better graphics, sound, story and puzzles. It is splendidly conceived and executed.*

MISSES: *Not all of the game's puzzles are well-integrated. There are too many puzzles for puzzles' sake.*

LAST WORD: Shivers Two *is a candy treat for gamers who like their ghost stories laced with conundrums.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	26
Playability	16
Originality	10
Graphics	20
Sound & Music	10
Physical Components	10

OVERALL 92

Medium: CD-ROM
Developer: Istvan Pely
Telephone: (602) 491-0500

Supports: WIN 3.1 & 95
Publisher: Piranha Interactive
Website: www.piranhainteractive.com

Syn-Factor

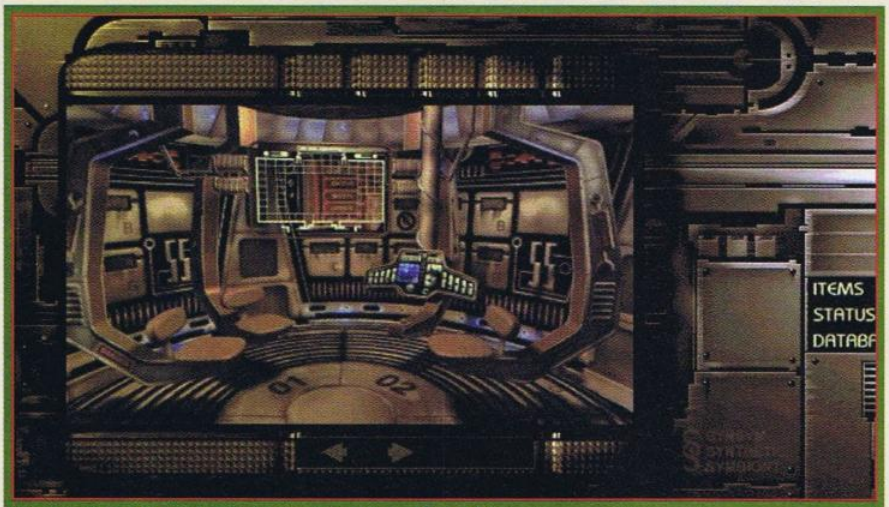
by Andy Backer

SYN-FACTOR, although not a particularly story-driven or big-budget space opera, is a great deal of fun to play. The player begins the game marooned on a derelict starship deep in outer space. The rest of the starship's passengers and crew members have been kidnapped by a pair of rogue battleships known as "dog ships." The player must first abandon the ship then follow the trail left by the raiders.

Your character has undergone a cerebral enhancement implant — a synthetic symbiont (the Syn-Factor) which provides additional brainpower. This symbiont (sym, for short) is a separate, humorous personality that talks to and advises the player character throughout the game. Arthur, in *Journeyman II: Buried in Time*, was influenced by a similar mechanical alter-ego.

As the plot thickens, the story becomes less and less derivative. Your character stumbles upon a conspiracy of galactic proportions. The trail first leads to a rundown outpost run by a whimsical robotic drone. Next, your voyage takes you to the luxurious Carswell Colony which — like the starship — has been stripped of its inhabitants by the pirates. Then it's off to the SYNSIM corporate offices where your character's sym was "born." Finally, there's a final showdown in a secret laboratory as you confront an evil and manipulative mastermind.

To be fair, originality isn't necessarily a substantive component of space operas, which are usually derivative by choice. A space opera is, after all, nothing more than a gritty Western set somewhere in the farthest reaches of outer space. Its plot always centers around men — in white hats — chasing bad guys in black hats *(does Darth Vader ring any bells? - ed.)* and culminates in the final do-or-die showdown. While all of this may sound overly familiar, the fact remains that *SYN-Factor*'s charm lies nestled in these intimate yet accustomed surroundings. The scientific aspects are plausible, at least as they relate to the sometimes extraordinary world of science fiction. Players will no doubt feel as if they are actually working within a genuine spaceship.



The cockpit of the shuttle ship (notice the rust colors).

The puzzles, too, lend an air of authenticity to the game, evolving beyond the typical scavenger hunts found in most adventure games. Players are tasked to solve real sci-fi-related problems — such as the navigation of a spaceship.

Although everything from animations, full motion video clips, sound effects, voice overs and music is well done — sometimes demonstrating some cutting-edge workmanship — these nuances are few and far between. More visual and auditory elements are needed to break up the monotony of wandering through all-too-similar looking corridors. Additional sound effects would have been quite evocative as well. Certainly, giving the "sym" a voice would've helped. Having to read her text-based comments, each and every time, diminished her appeal and sense of purpose.

The precious few video clips are the only visual element that aren't handled with the same level of technical expertise. The level of science portrayed suggests that the communication devices should be far more sophisticated than the poor quality video clips make them out to be. More and better video clips would have dramatically enhanced this product.

Istvan Pely, the young genius who developed *SYN-Factor*, is to be highly commended for having put together such a fine effort. It's obvious that the designer worked under telling constraints, and was limited by a tight budget. Still, his creation is enjoyable and memorable, even though it is occasionally marred by inconsistency. I can't help but wonder what he could have wrought with a few more dollars. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *A challenging adventure, making full use of sci-fi-related puzzles.*

MISSES: *Limited production values. Sym could use a voice.*

LAST WORD: *Well done and certainly above average, it may not satisfy the more big budget-oriented consumer.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	26
Playability	17
Originality	7
Graphics	16
Sound & Music	8
Physical Components	8

OVERALL 82

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN95, DOS
Developer:	Attic Entertainment	Publisher:	Sirtech Software, Inc.
Telephone:	(315) 393-6451	Website:	www.sir-tech.com

Realms of Arkania III: *Shadows Over Riva*

by Andy Backer

WITH THE release of *Realms of Arkania III: Shadows Over Riva*, Sirtech has published the final installment of their hugely successful *Realms of Arkania* Northlands Trilogy. And just as *Star Trail* surpassed *Blades of Destiny*, *Shadows Over Riva* eclipses both. It's easily the best chapter of the entire trilogy.

The series began five years ago when Attic Entertainment adapted *Das Schwarze Auge* — Germany's number one paper-and-pencil role-playing game — and converted it into a computer game entitled *Blade of Destiny*. Sirtech then had it translated into English, then released it in the

Play occurs on a 3D level.

States. The game possessed an extraordinary amount of depth and detail, thereby impressing a number of experienced gamers — but in the end, it was too complicated for most beginners. Sirtech and Attic went back to the drawing boards, automating *Destiny*'s sequel *Star Trail* to such an extent that it won several role-playing game-of-the–year awards.

Riva takes the automating concept even further. In Beginners Mode, play isn't the least bit intimidating, and during Advanced Mode, experts can still retain control over all of the game's many options.

Unlike *Blades of Destiny* and *Star Trail* (whose stories, by and large, took place over a large two-dimensional travel map), gameplay in *Riva* occurs on a three-dimensional level. The action takes place in, under or just outside the walls of one particular city.

As we soon learn, thousands of Orcs have banded together and threaten to destroy this vestige of civilization. Curiously, ordinarily brave warriors taking up residence within the city have laid down their arms and refuse to fight the Orcish horde. To add salt to the wound, prejudice, fear and suspicion rule the streets, and murder stalks the night. Persistent rumors abound regarding a band of outlaws inhabiting the city's sewers. Worse still, even pets and other small animals have begun to disappear.

In terms of departures, *Arkania's* tired travel map has been junked. In its stead, *Riva* has been fitted with a new graphics engine in order to retain the 3D visual perspective throughout play. The Automap and Autodiary have also been improved. New print options have been included so a player can print out diary information, character statistics, or any books and letters s/he may find. The game has more than 50 fully animated monsters and over 400 weapons, magic items and an assortment of new spells to cast. There are more than 100 characters to speak with, as well as some brand-new Autocombat options. *Riva* also includes more cut-scenes, digitized speech, music and sound effects than in any of the aforementioned games. Also, for the first time in the series, players can now access an online game manual.

Riva's dull combat system and failure to graphically maintain pace with other RPGs keeps it from becoming a truly great role-playing game. Gamers wander through

There are move than 100 characters to speak with.

uninhabited streets, never once coming across any animated townspeople, such as those found in *Daggerfall*. Instead, the player must learn about them over the course of reading several text-based pop-up screens.

All in all, *Riva* is a solid and satisfactory multicharacter role-playing game. Role-playing gamers — many of whom haven't encountered a good multicharacter role-playing game these last few years — will undoubtedly welcome *Riva* with open arms. Gamers who like to go on large party quests will be happy to learn that *Riva* meets all of the traditional role-playing requirements — and then some.

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Its graphics, sounds and music are even better than in* Star Trail.

MISSES: *It still uses the same combat module. The streets lack animated characters*

LAST WORD: Riva *is a solid adventure, just not state of the art.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	25
Playability	16
Originality	9
Graphics	17
Sound & Music	10
Physical Components	10

OVERALL 87

simulation

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS, WIN 95
Developer:	Teque London	Publisher:	Eidos Interactive
Telephone:	(415) 616-2022	Website:	www.eidosinteractive.com

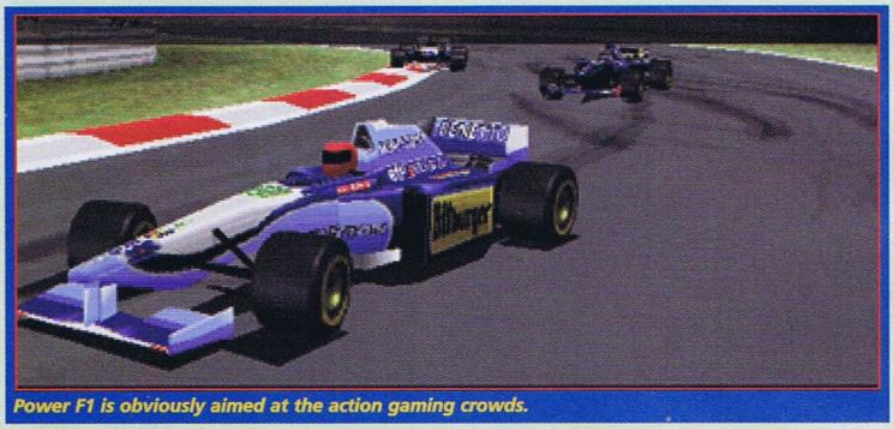
Power F1

by Alan C. Fusco

COMPUTER RACING simulations aren't exactly in great abundance these days, and the market can probably rubber stamp a few new entries. However, would-be contenders face an exasperating starting lineup, filled with solid, accurately modeled entrenched workhorses. For instance, the Sierra/Papyrus team has both *Nascar Racing 2* and *IndyCar Racing 2*. Microprose, on the other hand, has the Formula 1 racing slot sewn up with *GrandPrix II,* while Bethesda's soon-to-be introduced *X-Car* looks to provide some serious racing muscle for players interested in tinkering with next generation racing cars. Each of these simulations feature cars that have been developed with detailed physics models in mind. All contain a myriad array of car-related parameters to tweak and accurately rendered racing tracks; they can emulate single races through entire seasons, and many even allow the player to customize his or her car. In addition, all of these truly demanding simulations include a less-exacting arcade mode and enough options (e.g. automatic steering, braking, shifting) to function as a stripped down, action-oriented arcade-like racing game.

So where do these titles leave *Power F1,* the newest entry sponsored by the Eidos Interactive team? In my opinion, this places the game in a perilous position, especially since it's being marketed as an action-oriented racing game. Unless the game car therefore demonstrate some aspect o Formula One auto racing that the more serious simulations can not, *Power F1* faces a very tough battle just to make it to the finish line.

Fortunately, the publisher had the good sense not to market *Power F1* as a racing simulation. They chose, instead to tout the product as an arcade racer, while emphasizing heavily the fun aspect of the game. All the player need do is jump in and start racing. No fancy car setups or other time-consuming chores are necessary. I had no problem just firing up the game and starting a race. The default controls were, for the most part, intuitive; moreover, they can easily be changed at the player's discretion.



Power F1 is obviously aimed at the action gaming crowds.

The central features of *Power F1* are its easy start-up options, split-screen multiplayer support and fully developed statistics and circuits, derived from the 1995 Formula One racing season. There are several user aids conveniently included: on-screen help (which tells the user to speed up, slow down or when they're approaching a turn), a racing line display showing the optimal path through the course, autobraking, autoshifting, and automatic tire selection. Game difficulty can be adjusted from easy through to very hard, although the relatively inadequate manual gives no indication or how they affect play. I can only assume that they have an impact on the responsiveness of the computer-controlled racers or trigger various settings of the player's car.

> *"Power F1 faces a* VERY TOUGH *battle just to make it to the finish line."*

The player can choose between racing a single course, a Championship season (racing all 17 tracks), or a Shoot-Out competition. The Shoot-Out is perhaps the most interesting option. The player thunders down each track, accumulating points depending upon his or her outcome in each race. Players must qualify for each new race by finishing in the top seed. The overall object of the game is to finish each race with enough points to advance on to the next round and ultimately win the final race. If the conditions for each race aren't met, the player is "shot-out" of the competition for good.

The 17 tracks included in the game are Silverstone, Monaco, Estoril, T1 Circuit Aida, Monza, Suzuka, Interlagos, Catalunya, Hockenheim, Spa, Imola, Adelaide, Montreal, Hungaroring, Nurburgring, Buenos Aires and Magny Cours. Once a circuit is selected or a Championship season started, the player can choose to either practice or to attempt to qualify before the actual race is started. *Power F1* also lets the player pick any of the 24 cars portrayed, although they cannot customize the cars or edit the driver or team names.

There are some settings that supposedly have an effect on the physical attributes of each car, but the system doesn't come anywhere near its competitors' setup capabilities. Therefore, it's difficult to gauge the impact each setting has on car handling. The Workshop allows the player to change the angle of the wings, brake bias, tire condition (soft, medium, hard, wet), tire pressure, suspension, gear ratios, steer-

Missing the "feel" of racing.

ing max lock and amount of fuel carried. Realism settings are limited to weather effects, which are randomly generated for each race (sunny or overcast), the effects of car damage, activation of gravel traps and auto tire selection.

After "putting the pedal to the metal," I discovered that racing was as fast and furious as I would've expected from a stylized arcade game. However, I never got the feeling that I was indeed "racing." Sure, there were cars zooming by, each eliciting authentic-sounding noises. Yes, I was driving around a track that exhibited the illusion of speed. But something was missing; I guess it's what simulation fans would call the "feel" of racing.

When I fire up *Nascar* or *IndyCar*, I really feel as if I'm on a racing track, not just seated in front of a monitor. My sensations are telling me that my car is actually speeding down the race track and not some illusorily contrived course. I find myself leaning into the turns, my palms sweat-soaked and my heart thumping wildly like a race horse cooling down in the midday sun. With *Power F1*, I never felt like I was driving a racing car; it was more like guiding a little car around and around a big race track. While not necessarily a flaw, I couldn't help but feel disappointed by the overall superficial experience.

In my humble opinion, pulse-pounding sound tracks are a primordial ingredient of successful racing sims. To make matters worse then, Eidos made, what I would consider, a poor design decision. With a routine installation, no music is included, just digital racing sounds. The readme text file indicates that a full DOS-based installation is necessary in order to invoke music. A full installation, mind you, is some 90 MB in size. Frankly, I just didn't have the hard disk space to warrant full installation, so I had a relatively uninspiring racing experience.

There were also other, what I consider, design snafu's. For instance, although there are some 17 '95 racing circuits to choose from, the player can not determine what each track looks like until after it is has been selected.

Power F1 does have some good multiplayer options going for it. Two players can use the same computer to race in split screen mode — including serial connection capability — or up to six players can compete over a network connection. The manual and network connect screen are mute concerning the type of network protocols that are supported. Unfortunately, there are no provisions for either modem or Internet connections.

Power F1 isn't a bad game. The game is obviously aimed at the action gaming crowd, and it will likely do well with them. But still I have to ask myself why anyone would purchase a purely arcade-type racing game, when more sophisticated sims already cater to both audiences? For the gamer that craves a purely arcade approach to Formula One racing, *Power F1* should fit the bill. The simulation aficionado, though, would be wise to check under the hood, perhaps sticking with what he or she already has. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Easy to start racing, split-screen racing on the same computer, FIA license with actual team names and cars, six player network mode, split-screen two player mode.*

MISSES: *Mediocre manual, a relatively poor simulation engine given the competition.*

LAST WORD: *This game will appeal to arcade and action gamers who have little interest in simulation details; racing simulation fans, however, will find the game too "light" for their tastes.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	20
Playability	20
Originality	8
Graphics	18
Sound & Music	5
Physical Components	5

OVERALL 76

Counterpoint

by Mike McHale
Lead Game Analyst

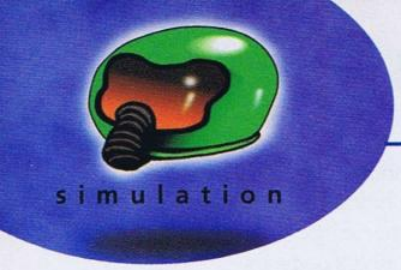
A rebuttal to *Power F1* review

lthough the reviewer of *Power F1* clearly states that the game is something of an arcade game, he holds it to the same standards as the other racing simulations on the market. While it is true that hardcore simulation experts will be put off by the arcade feel, the average user will find the game much easier to use and to play.

Our direct competition in F1 racing games comes from Microprose's *Grand Prix II*, which definitely has the upper hand as being a true simulation. From an average user's standpoint, though, *GPII* game is very difficult to play, even with its "arcade" options toggled on.

We have received a lot of feedback from racing sims fans, and *Power F1* seems to be the F1 game of choice for head-to-head and multiplayer games.The game is much more forgiving than others; typically, your car won't spin out of control as easily in some other F1 racing games. This becomes an important aspect of play when you're competing against five other human opponents and cars are swerving all over the road.

"...why would anyone purchase a purely arcade type racing game when more sophisticated sims already cater to both audiences?" Does the competition really match up to *Power F1* as an arcade-style game? We don't believe so. The fact that *Power F1* is easier to get right into and play, coupled with the multiplayer options, should make this title very attractive to a large number of people. Furthermore, the full version of *Big Red Racing* is also included with *Power F1*, which definitely adds value to the game. CGE



REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS, WIN 95
Developer:	NovaLogic, Inc.	Publisher:	NovaLogic, Inc.
Telephone:	(818) 880-1997	Website:	www.novalogic.com

Comanche 3

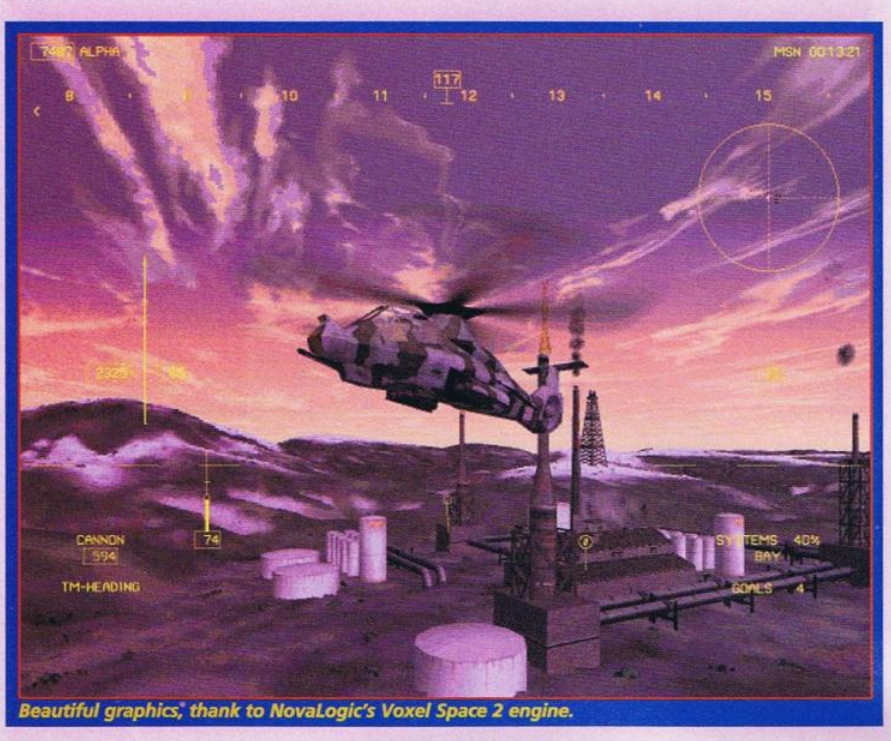
by Alan C. Fusco

NOVALOGIC, Inc.'s reputation isn't based on the authenticity of their simulations. In the past, the company has been satisfied with producing "sim-like" products emphasizing beautiful graphics and heavy arcade-like action, such as *Comanche* and *Armored Fist*. Their games have been easy to start and relatively difficult to finish, since they often place the player in situations no self-respecting officer would ever dream of entering. Simulation buffs have often had to take a back seat to the action-oriented crowd.

Therefore, with the release of *Comanche 3*, the question that immediately springs to mind, both for hardcore simulation enthusiasts and action/arcade fans, is, "Has NovaLogic departed from their basic gaming philosophy?" The answer is an unmitigated "Yes" and "No".

There's no doubt that NovaLogic would like to be taken as a more serious simulation publisher, while somehow retaining the tried-and-true formula that has successfully courted the action gamer. For instance, the press release for *Comanche 3* states, in no uncertain terms, that "A considerable amount of time has been spent working with military consultants and helicopter pilots to incorporate accurate helicopter flight physics into the game. Army and Boeing Sikorsky cooperation has led to super-accurate modeling of cockpit functions, stealth and weapon characteristics. The design team has even logged precious flight time in Sikorsky's Comanche simulator." Unfortunately, *Comanche 3* fails to live up to the hyperbole, still relying in large part upon action-oriented mechanisms to carry the day.

The first thing players should instantly take note of are the scintillating graphics. NovaLogic continues to remain well ahead of the other publishers in the realm of low-level, nap-of-the-earth flight. Their new (and of course patented) Voxel Space 2 engine is simply outstanding. The sky and terrain are beautifully rendered, not only from afar but when viewed close up. There are gorgeously-rendered trees populating much of the map. In fact, this is the first time I ever saw such wondrous graphic detail in a simulation.



Beautiful graphics, thank to NovaLogic's Voxel Space 2 engine.

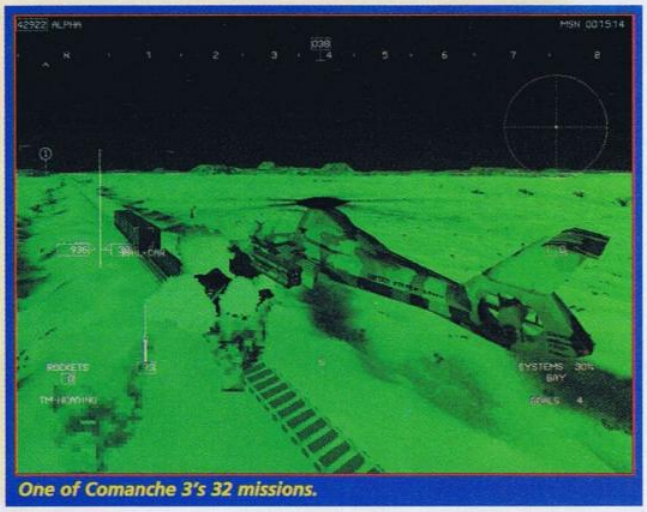
For instance, on one mission I took off from a snow-bound air base at dusk. The vivid, orange-red sunset was magnificent to behold. I stared in amazement at the subtle, ethereal reflections smiling up at me from a frozen pond situated just beneath my hovering gunship. Even the trees appeared to be encrusted in ice. It was indeed breathtaking — so much so that I was promptly killed while taking in the gorgeous landscape!

***Sky and terrain are* BEAUTIFULLY RENDERED.**

Believe it or not, there's more. Vehicles lumber across the ground, tearing up the countryside in the process. Even the tank turrets rotate! In the external views, players will be able to discern their pilot seated in the cockpit. Players tour the world, flitting over a variety of terrain including deserts, snow and jungles that, all kidding aside, have to be seen to be believed.

All these wondrous graphics, however, come at a steep price. Although a mid-range Pentium computer is recommended, it's been my experience that you need the processing power of a P166 to revel in the graphic glory at an acceptable frame rate. If players don't have the requisite horsepower, they can, if they so choose, disable several of the less significant graphic options to obtain satisfying frame rates.

It's very difficult to determine the accuracy of *Comanche 3's* flight model since the actual aircraft hasn't entered into full


One of Comanche 3's 32 missions.

production; moreover, few pilots can claim to have even flown it. I can announce that *Comanche 3* seems easier to handle than the advanced Apache helicopter modeled in *Jane's Longbow*. Then again, the Comanche is supposed to be fitted with an advanced "fly-by-wire" system to make flying easier.

There is a definite difference between the simple (some might call it "arcade") mode, and the more advanced flight modes. For instance, the player can toggle between linking the tail rotor (FANTAIL) with the cyclic control in order to achieve properly executed turns. In addition, players can limit the cyclic range to prevent extreme bank and pitch maneuvers. Likewise, players may limit the collective to avoid overtorque, may initiate autohover maneuvers, and even adjust vertical stabilization to set and maintain altitude. Players can opt to employ In Ground Effect (IGE) and retreating blade stall to initiate complex sideways maneuvers.

Avionics, though, are an entirely separate matter. At best, *Comanche 3's* avionics suite is overly simplistic, especially when they're contrasted with those found in *Longbow*. First, the player selects which targeting system he or she plans to use: TRGT Cycle, TRGT Priority, or TRGT Hold. Target Hold is the most sophisticated of the modes, permitting the pilot to simultaneously track up to six targets. Once a target has been designated, it can then be destroyed or handed off to the player's Team Mate (a.k.a. wingman). Somewhat distressingly, *Longbow's* rather sophisticated Zone of Fire targeting system is not in evidence here.

Comanche 3's weapons systems include a ventrally-mounted 20mm chain gun, Hydra 70mm rockets, AGM-114C Hellfire laser-guided missiles, and AIM-92 Stinger air-to-air missiles. In addition, off-map artillery can be called upon to saturate an area and, last but not least, the player's wingman can be issued combat orders.

This brings us to the Team Mate AI. Frankly, it's dismal: Your accompanying pilot seems determined to attain immortality — if necessary, by taking you with him. He refuses to stay on his leash, gallantly (if perhaps foolishly) straying off to meet the enemy, never once wincing at the first sign of danger. In other words, your wingman will fly straight into a hornets' nest and get toasted in the process. This makes a stealthy approach to the target all but impossible.

I read one on-line message stating that players might be wise to waste their own wingman immediately after taking off. Sage advice — especially since my supposed Team Mate shot me down on several occasions. To make matters worse, communicating between the player and his Team Mate is, at best, rudimentary: Apart from handing off targets, there's no way of issuing commands. Coordinated attacks between the player and his wingman are all but impossible to pull off.

It's tough to adequately evaluate the enemy's AI, since most missions are brimming with enemy units. As a result, some missions are extremely difficult to complete, since it feels as if you're alone battling against a huge enemy army. While the enemy units utilize the terrain to maximum advantage, they don't seem to be all that bright when it comes to other things. For example, on several occasions I was able to follow an enemy helicopter without ever being attacked. Apparently, their pilots haven't been trained to peer over their shoulders!

There are four campaigns comprising 32 missions, many of them similar to the ones found in *F-22 Lightning*. Light on overall gameplay, many of these missions will have to be refought several times before they can be considered completed. There are night strikes, pinpoint assaults, artillery spotting, and even suicide runs against heavily-defended outposts. Targets include tanks, trains, industrial complexes, a nuclear weapons factory, submarines and ships, along with Hinds, Havocs and Werewolf helicopters. In addition to the campaigns, *Comanche 3* also provides several tutorial missions where the player is instructed, by an actual military pilot, on various aspects of helicopter piloting and warfare.

Comanche 3's manual is adequate, but nowhere near as deep or voluminous as *Longbow's* documentation. Some especially important and useful air combat information has been included, which again demonstrates how NovaLogic is beginning to head down the path of true simulations. A handy printed keyboard command chart and keychart, with pictorial references to the various HUD indicators, has also been provided. While not to be confused with the keyboard templates commonly found in early MicroProse games, it's nevertheless a welcome addition.

So, who should consider purchasing *Comanche 3*? Gamers who fell in love with the previous incarnations of *Comanche* won't be disappointed with the latest iteration. The more hardcore flight simulator buffs, after having exhaustively played *Longbow*, will probably find *Comanche 3* too simplistic for their eclectic tastes. After all, even with its many improvements, *Comanche* still doesn't measure up to *Longbow*. In terms of aesthetics though, *Comanche 3* beats its competition hands down. This alone means that it's worth taking up for a spin. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Graphically, it's king of the hill!*

MISSES: *Poorly-implemented Team Mate AI; missions tend to be filled with an overwhelming number of opponents.*

LAST WORD: *A visually exciting offering, it's still bereft of certain critical simulation aspects.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	25
Playability	15
Originality	8
Graphics	20
Sound & Music	10
Physical Components	7

OVERALL 85

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS, WIN 95
Developer:	Elite	Publisher:	Accolade
Telephone:	800-245-7744	Website:	www.accolade.com

Test Drive: Off Road

by Shane Mooney

PLAYERS UNINTERESTED in anal-retentive realism or by overloaded options will undoubtedly find *Test Drive: Off Road* (*TDOR*) a slice of moto-sport heaven. Although comparison will be drawn to more realistic sims, such as *NASCAR* or *Wipeout XL*, emphasis, as you'll soon learn, needs to be placed on the *Test* segment of the game's title. While it's good at providing a quick jaunt around the off-road racecourse, *TD* quickly pulls in for lubrication, revealing itself to be more of a decent, abeit ungainly, first effort than an ideal racing game.

For starters, players can select one of four off-road monsters to drive: The Hummer, a Land Rover Defender 90, a Chevrolet K1500 Z71 or a Jeep Wrangler, each handling the off-road courses with ever-so-slight differences. Although the Practice Race mode depicts each of the four vehicles, the only customization the player is permitted to conduct is on the truck's paint scheme. Despite the fact that players will be tearing through rough terrain, there's no way to adjust or modify traction or engine performance.

There are three ways to tour the courses: Practice Race, Mixed League and Class League. Mixed League is essentially a tournament which pits the player against 23 other racers as they battle their way across six different races. Winning the Mixed League event permits the player to access six more tracks. Class League is like Mixed League, except everyone is driving the same vehicle. If the player is triumphant in the Class League (with each vehicle toggled to a hard difficulty setting), he or she will get access to drive any of four bonus vehicles previously unavailable: a Monster Truck, a 4x4 Buggy, a Hot Rod and a Stock Car, even though these can only be noodled with in Practice Mode.

Your Chevrolet K1500 Z71 has no problem blazing along, rocks, trees and other shrubbery be damned.

All told, players race over 12 different tracks, ranging from the snowbound to the mudstuck — conditions that affect truck handling performance. In SVGA mode, these tracks are beautifully rendered, as is everything else depicted inside the cab compartment. Trucks rip through the varied terrain, kicking up mounds of snow, mud and dust. Unfortunately, even on a relatively fast Pentium, players will cringe at the mediocre framerates achieved. Even in DOS, playing the game on anything less than a 133MHz machine is going to adversely affect game play — unless, of course, the player switches to the less apppealing VGA mode. In low-res mode, the terrain haphazardly blends together. It eventually becomes difficult to distinguish when the player's truck is actually on the course, or if it's about to take a nasty spill down an embankment.

Everything on the track is completely

Unlike sissy Formula 1 *or* Indy Car Racing, *these bad boys make small work of tough terrain.*

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Great hi-res graphics, extremely simple to set up and lite gameplay.*

MISSES: *In SVGA mode, high-end machinery is needed to run it; precious little ability to customize the vehicles. Forget about adjusting camber, torque and traction.*

THE LAST WORD: *Only racers intent on tearing up the turf will find this game appealing.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	20
Playability	10
Originality	6
Graphics	17
Sound & Music	6
Physical Components	6

OVERALL 65

noninteractive. Trucks bounce off trees, pylons and everything else, including fellow competitors' vehicles, with nary a scratch to their truck's fender. If a player does somehow manage to flip his or her vehicle over, they're merely repositioned at the last completed checkpoint to resume the race. Moreover, players needn't worry about being sent back too far, since it appears as if their opponents drive on an equally poor basis. However, catching up with the rest of the pack was relatively easy, even though my vehicle was caught between a tree and a concrete barrier. Conversely, a near flawless race resulted in the other drivers radically improving, to the point that they were breathing down my neck at every turn.

Frankly, I thought the game's sound effects needed some work. The primordial appeal of actual off-road racing is the rumble of these behemoths; the spectator's eardrums often feel as if they're about to burst. Unfortunately, these monsters sounded more like Hoover vacuum cleaners than they did like Hummers. The soundtrack, on the other hand, is top-notch. Inspired by an "Industrial Rock" tempo and texture, players will no doubt delight in the six thunderous tracks belted out by the group Gravity Kills.

Diehard racing aficionados will no doubt roll their eyes at this action-oriented title. Unless you're dead set to see and feel what 4x4 racing is all about, you may want to steer clear of this road hazard. GGE

Counterpoint

by Ted Tahquechi
Producer

A rebuttal to *Test Drive: Off Road* review

Thanks for taking the time to review *Test Drive: Off-Road* (*TDOR*). Accolade's goal with was not to compete with *NASCAR* or *Wipeout XL*; *TDOR* is an arcade off-road racer.

One of the truly refreshing and innovative aspects of the game is the ability to go anywhere, anytime. This feature is accomplished by rendering the complete world all of the time, not just the portion in front of the car. Consequently, visual fidelity directly in front of the player is reduced on some computers. We believe that the refreshing ability to drive off-road, anywhere, is worth a slight compromise in forward visual fidelity. Players should experiment with the display options, particularly draw distance and texture distance, until they find the balance of frame rate and visual fidelity that suits their tastes and the capabilities of their computer. We recommend a setting of seven for the draw distance and six for the texture distance. This provides a great game experience, and players can see in front of them to make the approaching turns.

If a player is doing poorly in a race, he or she will have a chance to catch up to the opponent cars and have a good race. When the player is an accomplished racer, the AI will keep up with the player by "breathing down his neck", which creates tension in the racing environment. We feel this is a much better solution than driving by yourself once you have gotten in front of opponent vehicles, as seen in other games. It makes for a truly adrenaline-filled experience.

In terms of the soundtrack, all of the sounds in the game, except a few crash sounds, were sampled from the actual vehicles. The Land Rover, Chevy and Jeep are inherently quiet vehicles to drive.

We feel gamers who are looking for an adrenaline-filled arcade racer will find *Test Drive: Off-Road* at the top of their list. Over the next year, look for more exciting driving games in the legendary *Test Drive* series. GGE

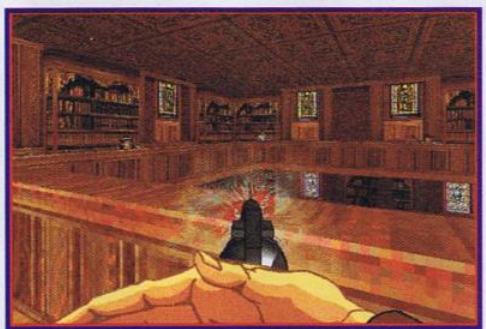
Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	LucasArts	Publisher:	LucasArts
Telephone:	(415) 472-3400	Website:	www.lucasarts.com

Outlaws

by Robert Mayer

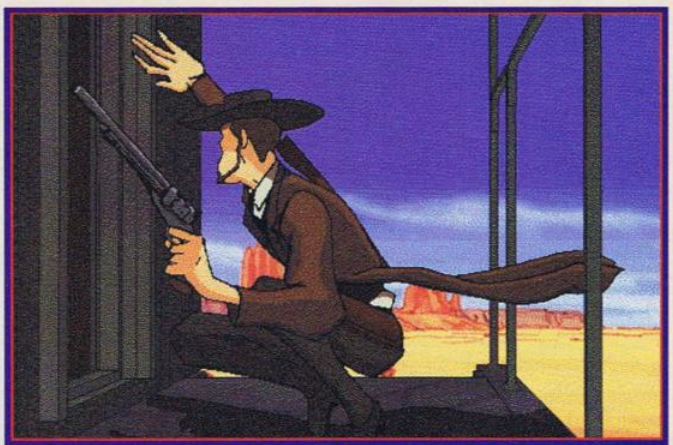
PARDNERS, there are two kinds of 3D shooters in this world — those that slither in through an open window, and those that bust down a locked door. *Outlaws* falls in the latter category, once again taking a tired concept and breathing new life into a pair of dusty, exhausted lungs.

Outlaws brings a fistful of features and facets to the gaming campfire, ranging from its stylized spaghetti-Western motif to its outrageous multiplayer shootouts. In fact, it is perhaps the most polished, seamless, flat-out slickest 3D shooter ever to hit the gaming stage. Unlike *Dark Forces*, another LucasArts 3D shooter, players may save their game at any point. There are loads of stunning cutscenes — the hand-painted, superb watercolor-stylized artistry, music to make Ennio Morricone dance in the streets and a high-res graphic engine that marks the apex of 3D gaming.



"The game's classy, fun-filled and contains enough ambience to make Clint Eastwood proud."

The best part of the game, though, is *Outlaws'* multiplayer capabilities. Like Blizzard's *Diablo*, the multiplayer version of *Outlaws* costs nothing to play. All that's needed is a connection to the Internet. LucasArts' reliance on Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone requires players to use *Internet Explorer* to connect to the Zone; fortunately, the process of hooking up is relatively painless, and the rewards immense. Up to eight desperadoes can compete in a death match, team play, or Capture the Flag. Gunslingers may even opt to play a personal favorite, "Kill the Fool with the Chicken" (KFC for short), a more violent form of the old schoolyard game, substituting fowl for a football and shotguns for flying tackles. And it doesn't stop there. Options include day or night settings, open spaces or claustrophobic chambers, and up to six different characters of varying capabilities.



Great cutscenes with art like this still are evidence of LucasArt's attention to detail.

In single player mode, *Outlaws* proves just as memorable. The story, complete with cutscenes, stretches over nine large levels and contains plenty of combat, with puzzle-solving to boot. There's also an assortment of "historical" missions, where the player assumes the role of a Western lawman. Here you must track down the bad guys, who may be hiding out in river canyons, old forts, ranches, sawmills or gold mines. Some of the most intense action takes place in the towns — both deserted and thriving — where sniping, ambushes, and roof-to-roof chicanery and leaping commonly take place. All of the traditional weapons of the old West are included: rifles (with and without telescopic sights), pistols, three types of shotguns, knives, fists, dynamite and yes, even Gatling guns. Power-ups include medical gear, boiler-plated armor, and Acme Vanishing Cream; an invisible man toting a sawed-off is not to be trifled with! And, of course, the controls are fully customizable, employing a simple yet effective method of configuration.

There are some burrs under the saddle, though: Much of the single player action involves tedious "find the hidden key" puzzles, the Gaming Zone software from Microsoft is still a bit buggy and some players may not relish the idea of trading in their Web browser for *Internet Explorer* just to play a LucasArts game. Moreover, when *Outlaws* was first announced, it was with the understanding that the game would be released as a hybridized RPG/adventure /action game. Although *Outlaws* is indeed excellent, it's devolved into a pure 3D shooter and nothing more. The game runs well on a mid-level Pentium and screams on a top-end machine, especially if you intend to pursue multiplayer gaming. In short, *Outlaws* represents LucasArts at its very best — the game's classy, fun-filled and contains enough ambience to make Clint Eastwood proud. It's a real barn-burner. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS:
Damn near everything.

MISSES:
Forces users to switch to Internet Explorer; main game a bit short.

THE LAST WORD:
Best all-around 3D shooter since Duke Nukem*; packs a .45 caliber wallop.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	28
Playability	8
Originality	20
Graphics	18
Sound & Music	10
Physical Components	6

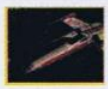
OVERALL **90**

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	Totally Games	Publisher:	LucasArts
Telephone:	415-472-3400	Website:	www.lucasarts.com

X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter

by Shane Mooney



FIRST THERE WAS *X-Wing*, a superb space combat "simulation" that redressed the balance of power between the Light and the Dark Sides of The Force. *TIE Fighter* followed in its wake, swinging the pendulum back in favor of the vile Empire. While they were both excellent sims, neither sported what is today viewed as an all-important facet of gaming: multiplayer capability.

With the release of *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*, we're finally able to slide into our favorite diminutive starfighter, ready to either forestall the evil Empire or crush the Rebellion. In and of itself, most players will be blown away by *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter*. If, however, you're already familiar with the standalone games *X-Wing* or *TIE Fighter*, chances are you'll be disappointed by the new multiplayer component, and downright upset over its underachieving solo play.

Don't be fooled by the title; players can pilot any number of different starfighters. As an Imperial pilot, players can fly a TIE fighter, TIE interceptor, TIE bomber and even an Assault gunboat. Conversely, as a Rebel pilot, players can tour the heavenly bodies in a Y-Wing, an A-Wing, a Z-95 Headhunter and yes, even the inimitable X-Wing.

The graphics are top-notch, immersing the player in the rich, carefully-crafted *Star Wars* universe we've come to know and love. The soundtrack is also wonderful, eschewing the awful MIDI rendition of the classic John Williams score in favor of the actual music. In fact, the evocative in-game music dovetails beautifully into the gameplay. To heighten the mood even further, LucasArts included in-flight communication during missions. Players hear messages from training officers instructing them on how to handle their assignments, reports from the tactical and commanding officers, and most importantly communiqués from their wingman.

As was the case with *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter*, *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter* requires that the would-be star pilot comprehend a growing list of controls, and how each affects their craft's performance. Beyond the basics, players must become extremely familiar with their ship's power, and how it can be distributed to various systems. Players will need to determine when power should be shifted between the ship's shields, lasers and engine. Moreover, a much more advanced weapon and targeting systems has been introduced, which requires routine practice to fully appreciate. To facilitate play, each starfighter is also equipped with a battle computer or astromech droid that is linked to the craft's sensor and targeting systems. These nuances were designed to assist the player, offloading some of the taxing responsibilities associated with interstellar combat.

If you enjoyed playing the bad guy in TIE Fighter, you'll get your turn again in this title.

Unfortunately, after the player has dispensed with the training missions, the game rapidly falls apart. To begin with, solo play is dreadfully inadequate. Although there's lots of missions to choose from, there's no underlying story, no campaign structure, and apparently no reason for continuing. To be blunt, I consider solo play as nothing more than an offline tutorial, readying the player for multiplayer mayhem. There are other problems with solo play, like the enemy AI's being so strong it's virtually impossible to beat. To make matters worse, your wingmen are about as intelligent as womp rats.

To be fair, the game was really designed to fill the multiplayer void left by the first two sims. Unfortunately, here again there are persistent problems. First the good news; LAN connections which can handle up to eight players are supported, and tend to run as lag-free as simpler modem-to-modem connections. Now the bad; *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter* is a very bandwidth-intensive game. When you try running it over the Internet, especially in Microsoft's supposedly rock-solid Internet Gaming Zone, gameplay is problematic at best. I experienced several hang-ups and outright crashes, not to mention especially choppy gameplay when I did manage to get it to work. Furthermore, only four players can compete together and, except for KALI-based connections, there's no dynamic entry mode such as the type found in *Quake*.

If you do manage to hook up, though, gameplay is a blast. Players can fly co-op combat missions, or team up with other players and go head-to-head. Imagine for a minute pitting a squadron of X-Wings against a gaggle of TIE Fighters. To make things really interesting, order four rebel craft to eliminate a star destroyer, while requiring each player to accomplish a specific goal, such as warding off wave after wave of marauding interceptors.

Pretty heady stuff, huh? Unfortunately, unless you're blessed with a T1 line or some other rapid high-speed connection, you'll probably want to pass for now on what could have been the sim of the year. It's a shame.

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Excellent graphics and sound effects, as well as multiplayer capability — finally.*

MISSES: *Low latency and almost no compelling solo play.*

THE LAST WORD: *Those with ISDN or faster connections will love the multiplayer capability; for everyone else, stick to the prequels.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	23
Playability	12
Originality	6
Graphics	19
Sound & Music	9
Physical Components	7
OVERALL	76

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	7th Level	Publisher:	7th Level
Telephone:	(972) 498-8100	Website:	www.7thlevel.com

HeliCOPS

by Marc Dultz

IN THIS HECTIC age of need-it-now instantaneous communication, and up-to-the-minute news-retrieval services, time has become no less a precious commodity than power, wealth or information. In gaming parlance, time governs many a gamer's playing habits, oftentimes dictating whether or not someone can sit down and truly spend the requisite hours to learn and master a new game.

Typically, action-oriented software doesn't place as many demands on a player's schedule as, say, strategy, adventure or simulation games. Boot up, dive in, mess around and get out, all in the scant minutes it takes to wolf down a walnut-packed cake or two. In that respect, 7th Level's *HeliCOPS* ably fills the bill, even permitting gamers time to lick their fingers clean and dab away at any unsightly residue before the next spreadsheet is due.

As backstories go, *HeliCOPS* is about as superficial as they come. It's been twenty years after Tokyo came tumbling down again, succumbing to the great earthquake of '98. Out of the ashes of despair, NeoTokyo — a veritable society of the future — has arisen, and with it has come an exceedingly barbaric and repressive criminal element. Nemesys, a crime syndicate of unparalleled brutality, has infiltrated virtually every aspect of life and, under the yoke of Maxwell Giger, threatens to envelop the entire metropolis. To root out this irrepressible scourge, Governor Koyo, the mayor of NeoTokyo, has established the HeliCOPS — melding the best law enforcement agents, high-tech operatives and helicopter pilots together — to seek out and destroy the Order of Nemesys before it's too late.

Premise aside, its obvious that the game owes more than its inspiration from a "twice-this-century" devastated Japan. The game is literally rife with Jap-Anime references, artwork and cultural heritage — which, as far as I was concerned, blended well with the overall look and feel of the product. Graphically, the game maintains a certain comic-book charm, which flows smoothly with the high-paced, adrenaline-pumping carnage depicted. During each mission the player, as a HeliCOP, is charged with accomplishing a specific goal — such as eliminating a gun-laden convoy or destroying the fortress known as SkyBase. Players must determine which of five helicopters he or she will fly into battle, selecting the equipment best suited to the mission at hand. Throughout, players will regularly have to skirt disaster, avoiding and, if necessary, destroying a host of fully animated enemy gun emplacements, ground vehicles, naval vessels, jets and helicopters. Power-ups, scattered about the map — oftentimes placed in rather clandestine locations, are purpose-centered, fufilling a gamut of roles, ranging from repairing damage to scrambling enemy missiles. Helicopters are fairly uniformly appointed, armed with chaff, 20mm cannons, buzz rockets, devastator and annihilator missiles. Some choppers are more nimble while others are more heavily shielded, so depending upon the terrain, motivation and known enemy forces, players will have to decide which aircraft best meets the job requirements.

Make sure to investigate every structure for potential targets, power-ups and secret objects.

After dozens of quick-witted sessions, I discovered that I thoroughly enjoyed *HeliCOPS* — if for nothing else, its incredibly complex and richly-illustrated urban and geographically diverse backdrops. Its expertly depicted cityscapes feature a wide array of fully animated vehicles, trains, barges and such. Buildings, caverns and tunnels had to be entered and searched, while bridges, shipyards and airports had to be negotiated with alarming frequency. Looking back, these important aspects of play all helped to flesh out the game universe well beyond its arcade-like foundations.

All in all, if the job's got you down, the kids are tearing up the lawn, or you're just waiting for that freeze-dried dinner to burst forth from the microwave, grab your joystick and give *HeliCOPS* a quick once-over. You won't be sorry. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Action intensive; intriguing backdrops.*

MISSES: *Power-ups can be difficult to locate; after several sessions the game becomes very repetitive.*

THE LAST WORD: *A pleasant, coffee break-oriented product.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	26
Playability	17
Originality	8
Graphics	19
Sound & Music	8
Physical Components	8

OVERALL **86**

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS, WIN 95
Developer:	Rage Software	Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Telephone:	800-771-3772	Website:	www.ea.com

Darklight Conflict

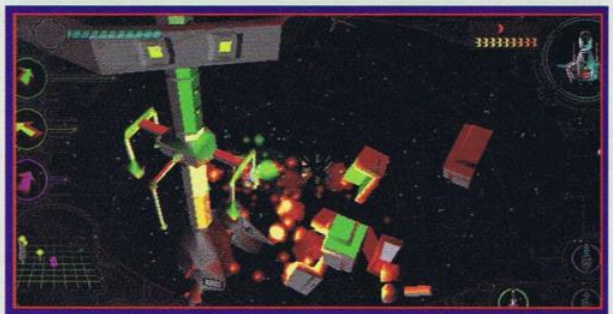
by Robert Mayer

WITH NASA'S continual cutbacks, scalebacks and delays, outer space may no longer be the final frontier, although it sure has become an important realm for game designers to examine. Hardly a month goes by without at least one space-based strategy or action game tumbling out of hyperdrive and into the local software store.

Developed by Rage Software Ltd., Electronic Art's *Darklight Conflict* (*DC*) is one of the more recent candidates to pay our frail society a social call. The backstory is lamentable, although in many cases, premise has never been the be-all criteria of a truly auspicious game. In the case of *DC*, the game spotlights a US Navy pilot that is abducted by aliens to help them fight an intergalactic showdown between opposing groups of "little green men" somewhere out in the inky blackness of space. W*ing Commander* it's not; *Starfighter*, maybe.

What *DC* does bring to the table are a handful of special attributes which may keep it competitive, at least among the second tier of space-based simulations. Though it lags behind the LucasArts *X-Wing* games, or Origin's *Wing Commander* series, *DC* compares favorably with many of the remaining space operas. For instance, perspective is handled well, while shading is very good. Overall, the graphic look is exceptional, if a bit brightly colored for gamers partial to the relatively subdued imagery portrayed in the *Star Wars* universe. Visually, the game is quite striking, color lavishly, if not always tastefully, applied. Light sourcing is pronounced and effective, while details like portholes and navigation lights are nice touches which caught the eye of this potential player. Even destroyed objects burst into satisfying explosions, while ships and structures break apart into weightless, floating debris.

On the other hand, spacecraft don't seem to behave as they should, supposedly unencumbered by gravitational effects. Then again, they don't perform like the X-wings and TIE fighters depicted in the LucasArts products, whose handling characteristics seem more reminiscent of Spitfires or Messerschmitts than deep-space fighters.



Even friendly fire kills look pretty good in Darklight Conflict.

Control is unremarkable; while playable, the game doesn't support more than two buttons on a joystick. Players must rely upon the keyboard for banking (rolling?) the spacecraft, which certainly detracts from the illusion of space flight the game tenders. Fortunately, controls are few, simple and, once understood, easily mastered. As a result, there's no need to employ keyboard templates or Thrustmaster-style flight controls for maneuvering.

The cockpit, though, contains the best and the worst elements of the game. Laid out similar to the one used in *Privateer 2*, the cockpit utilizes a number of heads-up displays to evince flight. Flying is easy, if statically portrayed; unless the ship approaches an object or the afterburners are engaged, there is little sense of movement. The radar is virtually useless since everything is represented by little solid balls which differ only in color. In the heat of battle they coalesce, forming a massive, undecipherable image, perhaps similar in conception to a petroleum molecule. Worse, the arrow indicators — supposedly integrated into the design to point in the direction of the nearest foe — seem to be about as much use as a compass in an iron mine. They wiggle and waggle about with abandon, unrelated to the world they are intended to help analyze. Using a single joystick button for both the trigger *and* the shields is also a questionable design choice. Though it works, it is hardly intuitive. Rapid fire exercises are reduced to a solenoid-destroying click-fest, since holding down the fire button oftentimes initiates shield deployment instead.

Darklight Conflict demands some hefty hardware to run, largely due to its graphic requirements. It seems odd that, having come this far, EA and Rage didn't go a step farther and support four-button joysticks, hats, throttles, and other peripheral components. While a forgivable act, the game's lack of pulse-pounding gameplay and truly scintillating space combat relegated the overall experience to a mediocre arcade shooter instead of a finely honed computer space simulation. Origin's *Wing Commander* series offers far better action, superior story and proper atmosphere, while the LucasArts sims provide infinitely more enjoyable space combat.

For straightforward action, *Darklight Conflict* may fit the bill — especially under the duress of network play. Otherwise, the solo mode has little to recommend it. Annoying voice-overs, puerile missions (some of which have multiple extensions, requiring that everything be completed in order to move forward), and an extraordinary lack of atmosphere in a genre where mood and ambiance are supremely significant, means *Darklight Conflict* equates to a forgettable product.

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Looks and sounds good, easy to play and contains IPX network support.*

MISSES: *Lacks detail, depth, good joystick support, and anything vaguely original.*

THE LAST WORD: *Only for the die-hards who must have every space game ever created.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	13
Playability	4
Originality	14
Graphics	15
Sound & Music	6
Physical Components	8
OVERALL	60

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS, WIN 95
Developer:	Monolith Prod.	Publisher:	GT Interactive
Telephone:	800-305-3990	Website:	www.gtinteractive.com

Blood

by Robert Mayer

IT'S A SAFE BET that when we reach that inevitable retrospective stage, many of us will euolgize the '90s as the "Decade of the First-Person Shooters." From *Wolfenstein* to *Jedi Knight*, there has been a steady evolution of first-person shooters taking place, from simple, orthogonally based mazes to elaborately constructed cathedrals of horror. Along the way, virtually every theme, genre and variation has swiftly fallen prey to the 3-D action game designer: horror, science fiction, fantasy, humor, and everything else stripped bare to be left rotting by the roadside. Most have espoused the successful "shoot first, ask questions never" format, taking note that nothing quite so effectively relieves stress as a demon doubling as a dartboard.

Of course, this theme does tire, and even the best of game engines needs some sprucing up or nuance to keep 3D action gamers coming back for more. The latest advance in 3D shooters comes, not surprisingly, from GT Interactive Software who, after hooking up with Monolith Productions, have brought us their latest offering, entitled *Blood*. Bearing more than a passing resemblance to *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Blood* uses an enhanced version of the 3D Realms Build engine that powered *Duke's* exploits. Whereas Duke was a blustering, sci-fi character, loaded to the hilt on testosterone, the protagonist of *Blood* is, well, stiff by comparison. Dead, actually, or undead; something about selling one's soul to foreboding deities, then coming back from the grave to seek revenge on your betrayers. Indeed, players begin with "one foot in the grave," so-to-speak — cemetery-bound and fittingly armed with a pitchfork.

Blood's theme smacks of B horror films, such as *Phantasm* or *Return of the Living Dead*, as it utilizes every eerie contrivance and familiar spooky mechanism rooted in ghost stories, tales of butchery and weird supernatural settings. Omitting much of the sexism that, for some, marred *Duke Nukem*, *Blood* substitutes the blatant sexual innuendo with gore, and lots of it. Reminiscent of Apogee's *Rise of the Triad* — splattering body parts, eye balls, and beating hearts about with abandon — *Blood* certainly warrants a parental guidance sticker for violence, though it comes off on a more humorous than frightful note. Enemies — which at the outset consist primarily of axe-wielding zombies and gibbering monk-like men armed with shotguns and submachine guns — bear only a passing resemblance to humanity; references to death and destruction, therefore, are swamped in cartoon-like intensity. Still, heads literally roll, and players can, if they wish, kick a zombie's noggin' about, bouncing the severed member off of walls like a game of mortuary marbles. Sick, but somehow oddly compelling.

Here's how I always enter a strange cemetery: with TNT!

The strength of *Blood* lies with its level design, wonderfully crafted and even better, in some respects, than *Duke's* inspiring layouts. Textures, colors and architecture are lavishly depicted, with railroad stations, funeral parlors and trains superbly rendered. The train is particularly worthy of mention. Players begin the level, camped on the exterior of a moving train, watching as a surrealistic landscape rushes by. The player must make his or her way back into and through the cars to eventually unlock the secrets. Falling off the train, of course, results in a gruesome death. While no less grisly, I recommend that players spend a moment standing beside the engine's cowcatcher, watching zombie after zombie perish beneath the churning wheels of "Phantom 666." Another hallmark escapade comes at the Carnival. Mime killing seems to be an acceptable pastime, while walking the high wire a feat of derring-do. Luckily, *Blood* runs as fast as a deep gash. Running in 640x480 resolution on a Pentium 133, the action is silky smooth and almost too quick to take in. This is mature technology at its best; though it lacks the true 3D capabilities of *Quake*, the Build engine is surely one of the best 3D engines currently available.

The fact remains, though; do gamers really need another 3D shooter? No, but this happens to be a good one. Lots of multiplayer support, cooperative and "Bloodbath" mode, humor, speed, and weapons — such as pitchforks and bundles of TNT — make for a rousing good time. With excellent level design, customizable controls, and mature technology, *Blood* is worth slipping off the first-person bandage for a serious look. The shareware is available now, the full version should be out by summer. All I can say is, if you like your zombies rare, check this one out now. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Action, speed, atmosphere, humor and skillful level design.*

MISSES: *Hefty system requirements, otherwise nothing especially new.*

THE LAST WORD: *Bloody, funny, and fast; if you like your action on the macabre side, treat yourself to a Bloodbath tonight.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	25
Playability	8
Originality	20
Graphics	18
Sound & Music	6
Physical Components	10
OVERALL	87

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS
Developer:	SCi	Publisher:	GT Interactive
Telephone:	970-522-1797	Website:	www.gtinteractive.com

XS

by Steve Honeywell

JUST WHEN IT seemed as if all of the game developers had gotten the *DOOM* craze out of their systems, along comes *XS*. Developed by SCi for GT Interactive, *XS* doesn't entirely knock-off some of the more established first-person games. In fact, at first glance, there are enough differences in the game to warrant a closer look, especially by adrenaline-pumping gunslingers like myself. Wide-eyed, I ventured unto the world of *XS*, hoping to like what I thought had potential.

For starters, there are over four dozen enemies in the game, each allegedly with its own set of tactics and plans. This says nothing of the added peril created by the various robot drones located about the arena. As with most games of this genre, *XS* is decidedly short on plot, long on action. Kick butt, take names, move on.

While the plot is negligible, game play is heavily emphasized. Players fight their way through a series of arenas, each of which is laid out in a peculiarly different vein. Moreover, three enemies and a horde of robot drones have been dumped upon the map for added carnage. The player's task is to wipe out the three enemies without getting pulverized in the process.

After game initialization, there's a brief, yet sophisticated action-oriented sequence depicting each of the three enemies. In the arena, players must "scoot-and-shoot" right from the outset. Points are scored for hitting enemies and drones. Downed drones provide the player with ammunition and shielding, as do eliminated enemies. Enemy corpses can provide added firepower or secondary weapons of sorts, as players swap their own weaponry for more lethal armament.

Were these, then, the underlying characteristics of a more dynamic system, laying the foundation perhaps for a more elaborate world, *XS* might have proven somewhat interesting. Unfortunately, that's the concept, taken to a premature climax. With every arena entered there are three new enemies and improved terrain features, but little else. Even points racked up seem to have no real consequence on game play. Only on occasion are new weapons made available or extra ammunition provided, usually broken out for achieving certain goals.

Computer-controlled drones like these offer ammo and shield boosts when destroyed.

Even the weapon-swapping notion, which could have been intriguing, ends up an ill-conceived concept. Players will tire of the idea, grabbing their favorite primary and secondary weaponry at the first opportunity. If the player had access to other weapons, swapping armament would actually have some value, permitting for the introduction of new weapons sooner than might otherwise be ordained by the game system.

Unfortunately, this contrivance only serves to exemplify other poorly executed features. Although a seemingly well-thought out product, everything, upon further inspection, appears to be superficially handled. I'll admit that my initial impression wasn't the best. First, in a Windows 95-dominated market, *XS* runs exclusively under DOS, with no mention in the manual on how to install or run the product in Win95. Secondly, the manual's references to certain tables and charts don't appear where they should. A glaring discrepancy, in my estimation, poor quality control at the component level oftentimes represents more of the same shoddy workmanship at the game level.

Jagged, unattractive game graphics that animate well clash against the nicely rendered, but poorly designed, cut-scene segues. The control interface literally requires the player to have three hands to properly operate: one on the mouse and two hovering over the keyboard. There's no problem, if moving and shooting is all that your doing; but try to drop cameras, move, aim and fire simultaneously and you'll find yourself wishing you could sprout another appendage. Finally, the developer and publisher claim that the enemies and encounter sequences differ substantially with each new level. Frankly, I didn't perceive any incremental changes of significance.

Ultimately, the problem with *XS* is that it's been done, and done better. It's dull and repetitious, each arena seemingly blending with one another. The psychological profiles of the different enemies are poorly implemented, preventing the player from learning whom he or she will be squaring off against next. The so-called "revolutionary enhanced character AI" is nothing new, and *XS* as a whole, suffers from the same over-eager, "excessive" maladies that plague other poorly concocted shooters. They're boring. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Cool intro sequences for each of the enemies, slightly more interesting spin on 3D first-person, action games.*

MISSES: *Laughable cut-scenes, weak control scheme, repetitious gameplay, no Win95 support.*

THE LAST WORD: *Not the worst first-person action game ever made, but mediocre.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	13
Playability	10
Originality	13
Graphics	12
Sound & Music	5
Physical Components	9
OVERALL	**62**

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	Fenris Wolf	Publisher:	GT Interactive
Telephone:	(800) 610-GTIS	Website:	www.gtinteractive.com

Rebel Moon Rising

by Shane Mooney

A SHORT TIME AGO, Intel released their highly touted MMX chip; a technological leap forward that, from all the accompanying hype, was considered the future of computing. With it, gamers could experience unparalleled realism; richer colors, ultra-fast action and breathless gameplay.

Rebel Moon Rising, one of the first MMX-exclusive games to hit the market, ushers in this new age of computing. After having played the shareware version of the game, all I can say is that if this is the title that heralds a new dawn in computer gaming, I think I'll take a nap instead.

Don't get me wrong. *Rebel Moon Rising* isn't necessarily a bad game, as you'll soon see. Quite frankly, though, there really isn't much of anything demonstrated in the product that hasn't already been achieved earlier, and perhaps better.

The premise reads like *DOOM* on the moon. The Lunar Free State has declared its independence from Earth. The United Nations is far from overjoyed by the situation, so they immediately come down hard on the colonists. As a member of the Lunar Free State, then, you must fight against these totalitarian measures, waging your war of independence across treacherous moonscapes and war-ravaged space installations.

To be fair, the graphics are decent, running smoothly at 640 x 400 with 16-bit color. The most impressive features are the light-sourcing which emanates from laser fire and other weapons, illuminating the walls, floors and ceilings as the beacons streak towards the target. It's a cool effect, but nothing that I and most gamers haven't seen before. In fact, instead of referring to it as a *Quake* clone, *Rebel Moon Rising* is more of a *DOOM* clone, since the enemies, and most of the scenery, are rendered as simple 2D sprites.

Like most commercial shareware, players are treated to an abbreviated version of the full retail product; six of 21 levels were included in the version I reviewed. The missions are considerably more complicated than those encountered in *DOOM*, requiring that the player either seek and destroy specific targets, or perhaps defend them. Time limits are imposed on the player by way of limited oxygen supplies. An interesting, if irritating technique, players must therefore complete a mission within, say, 10 minutes, or die from asphixiation.

The game takes advantage of the MMX chip to do some fancy light sourcing.

Surprisingly, the graphics, while acceptable, paled in comparison to the aural component. Sound effects were vibrant and crystal clear, while the music score rocked.

Reinforcements can be requested with a single keystroke command. Gravity can be adjusted as well — an especially useful, if diabolical technique for thwarting the advances of onrushing enemy troopers. When the gravity is switched off, players can jump much higher and farther than they would ordinarily be capable of doing. Be advised that players can switch it back on at a moment's notice.

Although players can tour the moon on their own in single player mode, *Rebel Moon Rising* also contains three distinct means of multiplayer action: Combat, Squads and Capture the Flag. The Combat missions represent your typical free-for-alls; players shoot everything in sight, caring only about how quickly they can litter the corridors with dead enemy troops.

There's also a team-based form of Combat play called Squads. A squad's cumulative score is determined by the total of all of the individual player's scores. Here, cooperative play is the key to success. Gravity and reinforcements are enabled, and a player's allegiance can be changed at any time by choosing different armor color.

Capture the Flag is a specialized form of Squad play. The object is to capture the enemy's flag, then return to base. A difficult undertaking, since your flag must remain safe and sound in order to record a successful capture. Troopers killed in action while returning a flag drop it where they lie. The other side must then attempt to run near it. If successful, the flag is then automatically shipped back to its base of origin. Bear in mind that while all this is going on during Capture the Flag, gravity adjustments and reinforcements are in effect.

There are definitely better first-person perspective action-oriented games currently available. If you're bored with all of the other shooters out there, then I recommend giving *Rebel Moon Rising* a spin until the next *Quake*-killer shows up. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Excellent soundtrack and some nicely-rendered light sourcing.*

MISSES: *Poor design and inadequate gameplay elements.*

THE LAST WORD: *An unfulfilled portent of things to come,* Rebel Moon Rising *ends up as little more than a* DOOM *clone.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	17
Playability	15
Originality	5
Graphics	12
Sound & Music	9
Physical Components	7

OVERALL 65

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	DOS
Developer:	SCi	Publisher:	GT Interactive
Telephone:	(970) 522-1797	Website:	www.gtinteractive.com

TigerShark

by Shane Mooney

IN MOST ACTION shooters, players are typically able to fly, run or swim in just one environment. *Tigershark*, GT Interactive's latest action-oriented title, quite happily, provides for two, fully realized environments. Using a high-tech hydrofoil as their means of getting around, players skim across the ocean's surface, blasting enemy ships, unhindered and unfettered by international law. The hydrofoil can then submerge, to destroy, and if possible, capture (then eliminate) the enemy's underwater nerve center. While *Tigershark* isn't nearly as thrilling as some of the more widely acclaimed GT titles — namely, *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Quake* — it does offer a pleasant change of pace for gamers who prefer obliteration to negotiation.

In the not-so-distant future, society has exhausted the world's known fossil fuel supplies. The industrial powers, therefore, must turn to the world's oceans as a logical means of producing and filling their food and energy requirements. Curiously, the Japanese government has emplaced several Geothermal Taps along their coast's fault lines, which temporarily provides a tremendous boost of energy, while simultaneously serving to neutralize the pressure exerted by the converging tectonic plates. The derived benefits are short-lived, though, when a series of violent, long overdue earthquakes ensue, triggering massive tidal waves and uncontrollable flooding. The end result is that parts of Japan, and 60% of its population, sink into the sea.

Seizing the opportunity, Russia overthrows what remains of the Japanese government and takes control of the still-intact energy taps. Few people realize that the entire episode was contrived, acted out in accordance with the plans of Admiral Dmitri Konstantin, an insane Russian commander, bent on attaining global supremacy. Unless he can be checked, his zealous ambitions will only result in the devastation of the entire world.

It's the player's mission, then, to take the newest and most advanced US subsurface fighter, speed in and destroy some of the taps. The player is also charged with reprogramming the remaining taps, thereby preventing a worldwide cataclysm that would be otherwise certain to occur. And, in James Bond fashion, the player is also tasked to terminate the Russian Admiral and his base with extreme prejudice.

There's no shortage of different weapons onboard.

Players will no doubt ogle the richly detailed 3D graphics, though to truly appreciate them, they will need a high-powered 3Dfx card to maintain an acceptable frame rate. Players using slower Pentium-based computers, or machines bereft of a 3D card, are going to be very disappointed, unless they plan to run the game in low res mode.

Although the hi-res graphics are wonderful to behold, there really isn't all that much to interact with. In fact, it sometimes felt as if the environment was painted on as an afterthought. Players won't be able to shoot any of the marine life. When something does succumb to fire, there's a rather faint-hearted explosion followed by an altogether dismal destruction sequence. Beyond that, there's no floating debris to indicate anything transpired.

Hydrofoils come equipped with a complete arsenal, which is detailed in the rather slim manual. Everything from missiles to torpedoes to extensive countermeasures have been included, which expands the hydrofoil's repertoire of capabilities.

Players must embark upon a series of progressively more difficult missions that require deeper forays into enemy territory. They have but three lives to accomplish the sets of objectives for the nine missions. Fortunately, three difficulty levels exist which, as you might expect, affect mission performance and durability. For instance, on the "Milk Run" setting, neither the player nor the hydrofoil is affected by any nearby explosions. Conversely, the "Good Luck!" setting enables virtually every aspect of play and isn't recommended until the player becomes familiar with the system.

I thought the music and sound effects were adequate, though a bit tame. The soundtrack was lame, and when you consider that many of the action sequences take place underwater, there's a muffled quality that distorts what little else is left.

While by no means an able contender for the action game throne, *TigerShark* does contain enough impressive elements to warrant a spin at sea. CGE

OVERVIEW

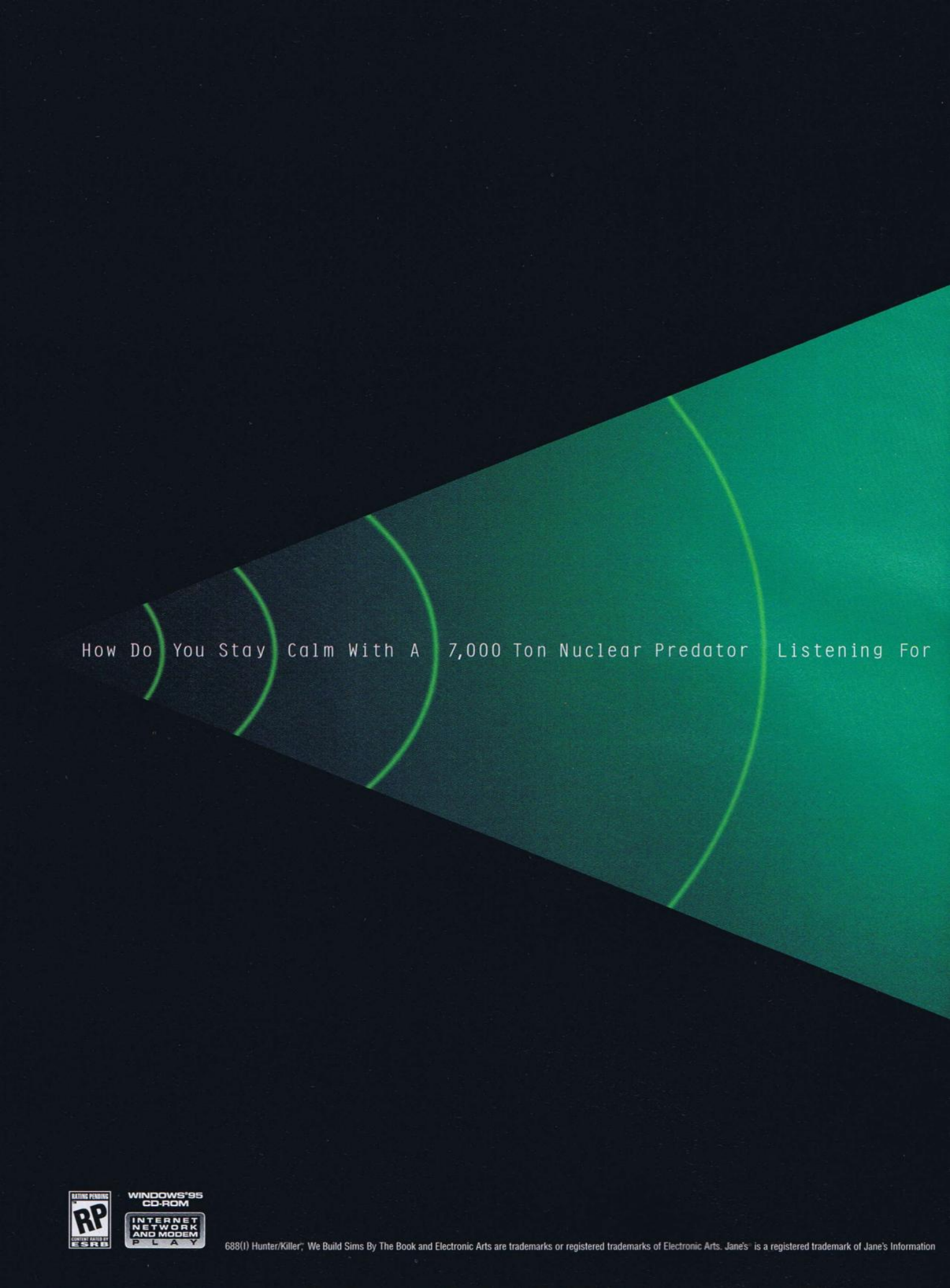
HITS: *Awesome-looking 3D graphics and plenty of action.*

MISSES: *Nowhere near as pretty without the benefit of a 3D accelerator card; gameplay becomes repetitive after several missions.*

THE LAST WORD: *Shoot 'em up fans will enjoy the unique environments and high energy gameplay.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	24
Playability	15
Originality	7
Graphics	17
Sound & Music	6
Physical Components	7
OVERALL	76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action

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	Electronic Arts	Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Telephone:	(415) 572-2787	Website:	www.ea.com

Need for Speed II

by Steve Honeywell

FOR MANY, the surest indication of power, wealth and prestige is defined by the car we drive. Oftentimes when driving rusty, old subcompacts, we can't help but lustfully admire the sleek new high-performance cars, which occasionally hurtle down the highways or pull up to a traffic light. Well, if you've ever wondered what it would take to slip behind the wheel of one of these impressive machines, your daydreaming episodes may have come to an end.

In *Need for Speed II*, Electronic Arts has modeled eight of the most sought-after cars available. Included are the McLaren F1, the Ferrari F50, the Lotus GT1 and Esprit V8, the Ford GT90, the Jaguar XJ220, the Isdera Commendatore 112I, and the Italdesign Calà. These cars, typically, hit the streets with price tags that surpass most new homes and are capable of reaching speeds in excess of 230 mph. Each vehicle is accompanied with an informative sidebar, explaining the car's heritage, statistics and other related data.

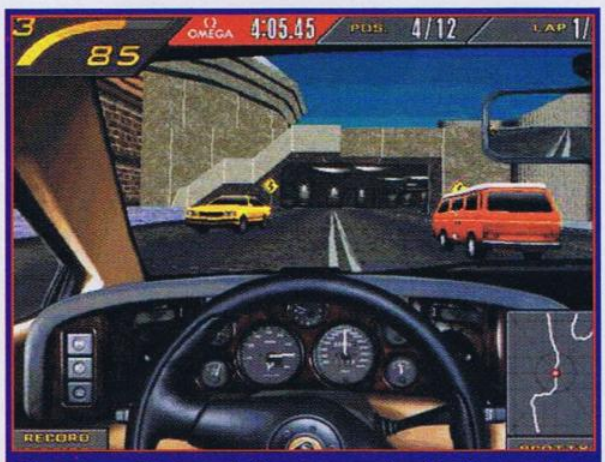
Need for Speed II contains a number of noteworthy features. For instance, cars can be equipped with either a manual or automatic transmission and be "painted" at the player's discretion. More importantly, both single player and several multiplayer modes are also available. In single player mode, drivers compete on one of six tracks, running in length from two to eight laps. Tournaments, on the other hand, require that the player race across all six tracks. In the "Knockout" mode, the first race of six begins with a field of eight competitors. After each race, the slowest car is eliminated from play; by the sixth race, only two cars remain. The finalists then move on to a head-to-head round, competing on a never-before-seen bonus track. If the player wins this race, the bonus track is then made available in all of the other modes of play.

Road conditions aren't always the best. Snow makes narrow passes and blind turns even more treacherous.

Still other options exist. Players must decide upon the level of realism they wish to employ. In simulation mode, cars handle much as they would in real life. Conversely, the arcade mode is much more forgiving, adjusting for slides and other especially difficult handling maneuvers. Players, if they so desire, can also choose to compete against certain preselected opponents. In addition, cars can be "setup" as the situation dictates, allowing the player to adjust for front and rear downforce, brake bias and gear ratios.

That said, let's turn to gameplay. Thoroughly challenging and absorbing, each of the seven tracks contains a series of difficult turns and switchbacks that can prove treacherous, even for veteran racers. The action is silky smooth to behold and the cars, tough as they are, handle the tracks quite differently. The music, although good, eventually wears on the gamer with repetitive play. Additional tracks would have made for a more ideal game. A tournament consisting of only six tracks can be completed in an hour or two, even with races running upward of eight laps.

In the end, *Need for Speed II* has its share of problems. With little replay value and some decidedly stiff competition already touring the racing circuit, players may be advised to look elsewhere to quell their driving passion. CGE



The McLaren F1 boasts the best top speed and braking, and for the driver who wants to win, it's the vehicle of choice.

OVERVIEW

HITS:
Great graphics and control. It's also as close as you'll ever get to most of these vehicles. Lots of options.

MISSES:
Gets repetitive quickly due to the limited number of tracks and the superiority of the McLaren F1.

THE LAST WORD:
It's cheaper than buying a real muscle machine, but you'll nevertheless feel cheated when the checkered flag is dropped.

Ratings

Dollar Value	18
Playability	18
Originality	3
Graphics	19
Sound & Music	7
Physical Components	6
OVERALL	71

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	Cinematronics	Publisher:	Accolade
Telephone:	408-985-1700	Website:	www.accolade.com

REVIEW

sports

Jack Nicklaus

by Bill Holmes

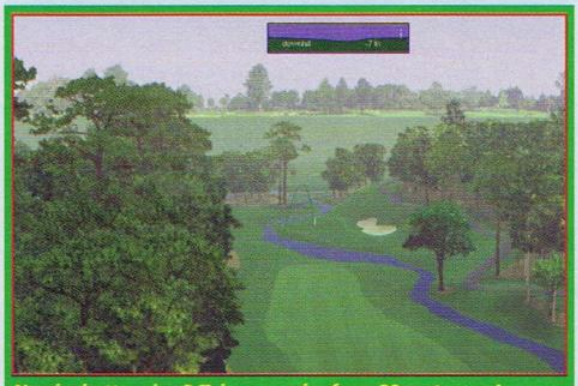
SPORTS FANS are used to seeing athletes make comebacks, but software titles usually hit a plateau from which they coast or fade. But with *Jack Nicklaus 4* (*JN4*), Accolade has defied the odds, stared down the competition, and reclaimed the crown for the best golf game on the market.

JN4, like Jack Nicklaus *Signature Edition (JNSE)*, is really two games in one: a golf game and a course designer. On both counts, the improvements are stunning; a quantum leap beyond the previous editions. In addition, Accolade has addressed every omitted feature that has held *Jack* in check since the emergence of *Links* a few years ago.

While the game play of the older versions was good, putting became predictable for power users, the physics of the ball barely acceptable at best. *JN4* really feels like golf: balls spin, bounce and slide, and the short game is challenging to master. The sound of the club striking the ball confirms the quality of each stroke. There are a trio of swing meters, ranging from shot to chip and putt, while the ebb and flow of each is consistently solid. Arcs and arrows help the player direct their shot but in no way should be construed as a "gimme"; interpreting the terrain is still necessary. Adjusting the shot for power of stroke, fade or draw is acheived with arrow keys or via the mouse.

No more sub-par [sic] graphics, either. *JN4's* screens are top shelf, as photo-realistic as they come, the rendering and screen redraw rates blindingly fast. All of the great features a player could ever hope for are here: visible weather conditions, an animated slope grid (outstanding for green reads!), an unlimited camera angle system (revolving 360° and elevating over the character some 30 meters high), replays from all angles using tracking dots, left-handed players (with left-handed swing arcs), fly-bys...I could go on forever. *It's all here.*

The interface is simple and efficient, the manual thorough, the on-line help concise and the commands intuitive. Load the disc and you'll be playing or designing in five minutes. Games and shots can be saved and reloaded easily. This is a textbook example of how games should be packaged and presented.



Need a better view? Take a gander from 30 meters up!

The course designer is equally stunning. Whether newly created or imported from another course, each hole can be clicked and dragged about the land plot and can be renamed, resized and renumbered. Inserting objects is just as easy. To place a tree on the course, simply click a tree icon then click its location on the course. Double-clicking the placed object then allows the designer to reconfigure its size. The rendered view can be tiled along with the design window to view the work in progress. This powerful tool allows computer golfers to create and modify endlessly, and since there are thousands of *JNSE* courses available online as freeware, *JN4's* game life is unending.

Accolade does advertise that *JN4* supports hundreds of existing *JNSE* courses, but this needs clarification. While it will import a *JNSE* course and convert it, only the layout and terrain will be replicated. Objects like trees, houses and rocks must be recast. And although this seems like a lot of work, most designers will tell you that the layout is the hardest part of the project. For those who may yearn for new courses but find designing a course a real challenge, Accolade has also included a Design Wizard that allows the user to input hole pars, shapes and distances and then create the course with a simple mouse click. Even a novice can lay out a nice course in as little as 15 minutes (although it will take another five or ten to generate the course file).

JN4 has seven game types to choose from, and up to four players can compete head-to-head through a modem or serial connection; saved games and computer opponents can be used as well. *JN4* comes with five courses and Accolade plans on adding many more down the gaming fairway.

How good is *Jack Nicklaus 4*? When given the assignment to write a page, I was seriously tempted to pad the piece with only adjectives, but couldn't find enough superlative-related synonymities to match my enthusiasm; *unbeatable, an incredible value, seething with features,* they all instantly sprang to mind. In the end, I'll settle on *JN4* as my early favorite for Game Of The Year honors. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Excellent graphics, sound and realism. Ability to play alone, against recorded players or over a network or Internet connection.*

MISSES: *Huh? What more could you want in a game?*

LAST WORD: *Now that it's on a par (ouch!) with* Links *and* PGA, *the course designer vaults this game to the top of the golfing list.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	30
Playability	10
Originality	20
Graphics	19
Sound & Music	9
Physical Components	8

OVERALL 96

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	Looking Glass	Publisher:	Looking Glass
Telephone:	(617) 441-6333	Website:	www.lglass.com

British Open Golf

by Bill Holmes

LOOKING GLASS Technologies has mastered the art of aircraft simulation for home computers, so keeping a little white ball aloft should be a no-brainer, right? *British Open Championship Golf* captures the excitement and suspense of playing in a tournament, by adding some nice bells and whistles to a solid golf simulation.

I've long complained that most games containing big-name announcers or resonating sound effects soon wear out their welcome. Thankfully, *BOCG* is chock-full of fresh and informative color commentary, provided by none other than Jim McKay and Michael Bradshaw. At every hole, their narrative sounded natural and unforced, spanning everything from the distance a ball travels to the activity of the other golfers. Unfortunately, although eight professional golfers have been included as animated characters, their names aren't mentioned enough to be of real consequence. When two players are battling head-to-head in a playoff, referring to them as "those players that survived" just doesn't seem all that appropriate.

Just prior to play, an optional tutorial can be enabled. This reviews each hole and its accompanying features, using various voice-over commentary and 3D technology. Better yet, there is an animated caddie, which acts as a hint file and a video fly-by all rolled into one. A click on the mouse and the caddie's "notepad" appears, which contains a sketch of the current hole denoting the hot spots for bunkers and green reads along with an audio-based summary. The caddie can be removed from view without having any effect on the notepad feature.

The main viewing screen is huge. Players may also add a reverse-angle viewing window or various TV cameras, which can be placed virtually anywhere to record the golfer's swing if they so desire. The camera angle perspective is important, since it teaches, perhaps unfairly, proper play techniques. For instance, when the fairway is clicked, a blue line magically appears which shows the ball's expected flight path. While no doubt helpful, I'm starting to harbor mixed emotions about such directional aids in golf games; oftentimes, they make it too easy for the player to reach the green. Playing on the professional level and using the three-click swing bar, I had little difficulty driving the ball great distances with consistently good accuracy. Putting, on the other hand, was difficult, but that may have been because the greens are tough to read — the grid feature actually makes it worse!

Vijay Singh

I must admit that adjustments for heavy winds and slick greens was well-executed; bounces, rolls and backspin occurred on a regular basis. Wind, weather and course conditions are easy to set, and the weather can be changed manually or automatically during play. The graphics are more than adequate, and can be adjusted for different screen configurations, as well as detail density. Adding the gallery was a nice touch, although it's not animated. In fact, I noticed a sparse group of onlookers for the practice and medal rounds, then a thick crowd of spectators for the tournament (especially during the last few holes and the playoffs). Like the animated caddie and golfer, the groans, cheers and sighs of the crowd mirror the on-screen actions, lending credence to the overall experience. Most importantly, your caddie doesn't utter a word unless you prompt him!

BOCG has an online manual that is concise and thorough, even humorous at some points. Overall, the interface is pretty simple — aim, swing and keep moving. A series of navigational aids are available which enable the player to save games, adjust camera angles, research stats or scores, or create custom shots.

If the Tournament ends in a tie, the British Open format dictates a four-hole playoff and, if necessary, a sudden-death round thereafter. Even if the human player fails to qualify, the playoffs can be watched, shot by shot — although I have yet to witness one playoff that included players outside the familiar eight professionals. One other minor note: after all the build-up, there was no award ceremony or trophy presentation — just two guys signing off-the-air. Pretty lame.

In the end though, it's the ambiance that makes this game succeed. Gameplay is smooth, solid and challenging but not overly difficult, and there are a lot of nice amenities. If you're only looking for one golf sim, this may not be your first choice; but if the company makes more courses available, this one will surely hang around for quite a while. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Good tournament feature, excellent play-by-play commentary, ability to select multiple holes for practice, shot creator, overall ambiance.*

MISSES: *Only two courses, bad putting grid, not as challenging as other games.*

LAST WORD: *A wonderful game to participate in. Not the best golf game on the market, but a worthy addition if more courses are released.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	25
Playability	19
Originality	7
Graphics	17
Sound & Music	9
Physical Components	8
OVERALL	85

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	Sculptured Software	Publisher:	Acclaim Entertainment
Telephone:	(516) 656-5000	Website:	www.acclaimnation.com

NBA Jam Extreme

by Bill Holmes

SOME SPORTS titles are renewed every year with little more than a roster update. Thankfully, Acclaim brought plenty to the table to fully justify another version of its sensational stand-alone arcade hit. Plug in to *NBA Jam Extreme* and enjoy better graphics, more fluid motion, a flawlessly smooth Windows 95-compliant setting, "Marvelous" Marv Albert's caustic sound bytes and tons of new dunks, dives, shakes and bakes. While the game is based upon two-on-two instead of five-on-five team play, the product, nevertheless, is ripe with clever, if deliberate, game play.

Jump right in, because the functionality is smooth and simple to manipulate. After the initial options are selected, the game becomes a completely reactionary experience. The 3D polygonally-based engine and motion-capture technology results in an impressively quick display. Action is fast and furious, and the players, for the most part, keenly resemble their NBA counterparts. Turbo mode — integrated from the first iteration — permits players to move in double speed, while the new "extreme" level ups the ante to a blistering triple speed.

But, with up to four images literally rocketing down the court, bashing each other to grab a rebound, it's hard to determine exactly what is happening. Solution? Keep banging away! There's no such thing as incurring or receiving a foul; in its stead, players can push characters around, knocking them down if the need arises. A rating is even included, which calculates the probability a character will survive the on-court abuse!

One important clue that *NBA Jam Extreme* leans toward joystick jiggling over more cerebral play is the fact that the game stats are recorded by the gamer's player position, not the NBA character. Characters can be swapped at the conclusion of each quarter, with stats and amusing comments popping up for added flair. Once the final score screen fades, only those player images that were on the court at the end of the contest are depicted along with each position's cumulative stats. As players get heated up during the game, they advance in rating from "smoking" to "on fire" to "unstoppable." (Tip number one: feed your teammate the ball for a few baskets, and when he becomes unstoppable, let him crash the boards while you cut and run the fastbreak.)

"Action is fast and furious."

All the NBA teams and courts are portrayed, as are most of the key players. Players can opt to scrimmage in a practice mode or enlist in a tournament, staring down, in order, the weakest to the toughest teams. And if you're a real "bricklayer," there's even a cheat setting that maintains a close game score, should either team fall too far behind. The all-too-few modifiers can be accessed by the function keys and the escape button, while the game can be paused — indefinitely — at any time during the game. There is one nagging annoyance: the game continually reverted to the default keyboard settings each time I launched the program. I know it's a simple matter of hitting the <F2> key to re-instate my joystick, but as many a sage has queried, "Why?"

If the addictive nonstop action isn't enough to satisfy your interests, spend some time discovering and using the many Easter eggs built into the program. There are literally dozens of them, from huge, character-inspired feet to secret teams, invoked by several curious, if ungainly, methods (name/date combinations, keypad and controller movements, etc.). If you can't unlock them, investigate the various online services, gaming forums or the Internet. (Tip number two: before the game starts, save the stats and then enter MJT for the initials and March 22 for the birthday.) *Voila!*

Purists may choose to avoid this over-the-top, two-on-two approach, since it obviously wasn't intended to be compared to real basketball. For arcade fun, though, *NBA Jam Extreme*, like the name implies, "jams" it all in. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Fast and furious action, easy to play and lots of replay value.*

MISSES: *Resets to keyboard with each launch, more arcade than real sports game.*

LAST WORD: *Wanna save quarters? Buy this instead of trundling down to the mall's arcade.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	26
Playability	19
Originality	8
Graphics	18
Sound & Music	9
Physical Components	9
OVERALL	**89**

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 95
Developer:	Sierra On-Line	Publisher:	Sierra On-Line
Telephone:	(206) 649-29800	Website:	www.sierra.com

Front Page Sports: Golf

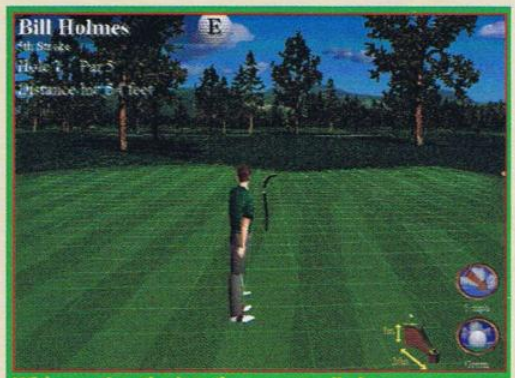
by Bill Holmes

JUST WHEN you thought it was safe to return to the software store, along comes another product that instantly tugs at your wallet. Sierra's veteran sports team has entered the computer golf wars, unveiling their *Front Pages Sports: Golf* game with "TrueSwing."

Unlike other golf games, which employ a two or three-click mouse-driven interface to execute back swing and follow-through, *FPS:G*'s TrueSwing takes a different approach. The angle and force of the shot is represented by the player exerting forward-and-back movement on the mouse. It's a logical innovation that makes you wonder, "Why hasn't anyone done this before?" Besides controlling the speed of the swing, hooking or slicing the ball can be achieved by left or right movement of the mouse. In addition, the player can rotate the viewing angle, aim the golfer (not the shot), rotate the club face, and address the ball from any conceivable angle. As you can see, the shot possibilities are endless.

If you've grown accustomed to other golf games on the market, this new system will take some getting used to. Instead of aiming the target indicator at a distant spot, the user aims an animated golfer. Putting isn't as reflexive an action as it may be in other games, and driving distances may seem a tad short. With practice, though, the interface eventually proves more intuitive to use — a relaxed and natural approach which other games might consider implementing. The convenient ball-tracker and the course grids are a big help, too. However, players needn't worry about relearning the game of computer golf; the tried-and-true three-click method has also been included and works like a charm.

Of course, all of this chrome would be moot if the game itself wasn't any good; fortunately, it is. There are 12 different types of games to play, against either computer-controlled or live competition, with lots of options for added appeal. Players can be created and edited, clubs chosen and skill levels selected. I especially enjoyed being able to create computer opponents with varying adeptness, as well as opponents of indeterminate skill. Now when you tee off, the computer opponent may not be the unbeatable pro you're usually used to facing. Just remember to avoid having them hustle you too badly!



With practice, the interface eventually becomes more intuitive to use, a relaxed and natural approach others may find favor implementing.

Besides being able to set wind and greens conditions, many other adjustments can be made, ranging from the depth of the rough to the frequency of your fellow golfers' comments and reactions. Scorecards, stats and alternate viewpoints are available in separate windows, and can be placed alongside the main viewing screen. If you're playing in a tournament, the leader board will reflect the overall score, as well as the current round. Club selection is depicted by using a pop-up golfing bag, while the pin telescopes in and out of the hole from any distance. Even the replays can be watched from four different viewing perspectives. Every aspect of play contains a keyboard shortcut as well as a toolbar button, and the help menu is intuitive and thorough.

The graphics are very good. Although I'd give *Links* and *Jack Nicklaus* a slight edge overall, *FPS Golf* sports superior animation. Redraw time, although not all that fast, was certainly acceptable, even with full detail turned on and files loading off the CD-ROM. Ambient sounds include the usual golfing effects, like clubs swishing and balls landing on the green. There's the occasional sounds of motorboats, sprinklers, airplanes and more; I even heard shattering glass when I drove a golf ball through a clubhouse window! The designers have a nice sense of humor, too — the player is chided if he takes too long between shots, and just wait till you see what happens when a golfer pulls the back swing too far to the left or right!

The version of the game I messed around with came with two courses, each containing a pleasant .AVI fly-by. A third course — the beautiful Coeur d'Alene — is supposed to be available, free of charge, when the game is released. Sierra has stated that more courses are forthcoming. I hope so; power users are known to get restless.

It's funny — a year ago, I couldn't live without playing *Links*. Now, with *Jack Nicklaus'* new course designer, and *Front Page Sports: Golf's* new interface, I don't miss *Links* at all. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Excellent new swing concept, versatile play and practice settings, adjustable difficulty levels.*

MISSES: *Limited number of courses, redraw rates a bit sluggish.*

LAST WORD: *You have to try TrueSwing to fully appreciate just how natural it is!*

Ratings

Dollar Value	25
Playability	18
Originality	10
Graphics	18
Sound & Music	10
Physical Components	9

OVERALL 90

Medium: CD-ROM	Supports: WIN 95
Developer: LucasArts	Publisher: LucasArts
Telephone: (800) 98-Lucas	Website: www.lucasarts.com

REVIEW

multimedia

Yoda Stories

By Alan C. Fusco

TWENTY YEARS AGO, George Lucas released *Star Wars*, a sci-fi cinematic saga of unrivaled proportions. Its continued popularity was proven in the recent past when the trilogy was digitally enhanced and rereleased to its adoring public. In movie-going circles, it's a rare occasion indeed when a rerelease can reap much the same accolades that the original garnered. LucasArts, recognizing the stature of *Star Wars*, recently released *Yoda Stories* — a multimedia-oriented product in the same vein as *Indian Jones and his Desktop Adventures*.

Graphically, *Yoda Stories* doesn't live up to the same wondrous extravaganza depicted in any of the movies. It is neither a deep game — with lots of mind-numb-

ing puzzles or plot twists — nor does it contain any reprise or new performances by any of the cast members. The characters depicted do not speak (at least in the audible sense), and there's none of the all-too-familiar soundtrack to dramatically underscore the story. In fact, in *Yoda Stories*, you won't find any of the multimedia glitter associated with the epic films.

So what is included? *Yoda Stories* is a surprisingly addictive little game in which each "world" can be toured in an hour or less. The game can be played directly from the CD-ROM or, if they so desire, players can install the software on their hard drive, obviating any further need for the CD. Also included — and almost worth the price of the game itself — is a video entitled *Making Magic: A Behind the Scenes Look at the Making of Star Wars Trilogy Special Edition.*

A surprisingly addictive little game.

Yoda Stories is comprised of several stories or missions, each of which embodies various randomly-placed elements with the same overall objectives in mind. Missions range in scope from warning a Rebel base about an imminent Storm Trooper attack to rescuing Princes Leah; all comfortably familiar subplots. The player assumes the role of Luke Skywalker, while Yoda, a sage of indeterminate age, issues instructions for the accomplishment of each mission. Successful play will ultimately result in the player learning how to use the "Force."

> *"Yoda Stories doesn't live up to the same* **WONDROUS EXTRAVAGANZA** *depicted in any of the movies."*

Game play is direct and simple. Move Luke around the map to locate those items needed to solve the puzzles scattered throughout each game world. Some of the puzzles, however, require the experience that is obtained with the passing of each game. Characters in the game can never be killed, which sometimes proves annoying, since the most direct way of resolving a situation (e.g., kill the Storm Trooper) may not be permitted. While the games aren't linked, the system tracks the progress of the player. Success and failure are noted and various awards may be authorized, which carry over from one game world to the next.

All in all, *Yoda Stories* is an addictive if lite gaming experience, good for filling a lunch hour void or for the unquenchable *Star Wars* gaming fixation. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Quick playing time, reminiscent* Star Wars *dialogue and adventures, and amusing combat engine.*

MISSES: *Quirky user interface, no speech, simplistic graphics.*

LAST WORD: *A very lite but addictive gaming experience set in the* Star Wars *universe.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	30
Playability	18
Originality	8
Graphics	10
Sound & Music	5
Physical Components	5
OVERALL	76

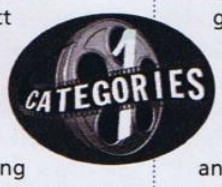
Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 3.1, WIN 95
Developer:	Jellyvison	Publisher:	Berkeley Systems
Telephone:	(510) 540 - 5535	Website:	www.berkeley.com

You Don't Know Jack Movies

By Steve Honeywell

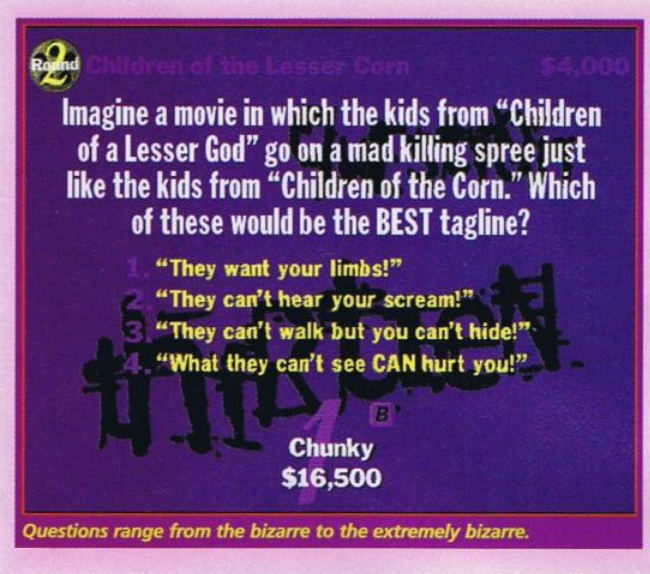
THE *YOU DON'T KNOW JACK* series has expanded, this time camping out on the doorstep of Tinseltown. Anyone that's played any of the previous iterations has probably tossed this magazine aside to rush out and buy a copy of the latest entry, *YDKJ Movies*. Good move. For the uninitiated, the balance of this critique is aimed at explaining why you might want to carpool with them down to the local software store before it's too late.

For the rookies, here's how the game works. First of all, one to three players can compete. The game is set up like a television game show; producers and other stage hands run around in the background shouting out last minute instructions before the show "airs." One player selects a category, and then the question is posed. Players have a couple of seconds to deliberate over the correct response, buzz in, then select one of four possible choices as their answer. The correct answer nets them points, while the wrong response deducts points from their score. In two- or three-player games, there's an option to "screw" the other guy by forcing him to answer a question. In any case, the game ends on a "Jack Attack"; a rapid-fire question-and-answer round that can spell the difference between victory and a "better-luck-next-time" slap on the back. During the course of play, there are still other questions that arise — such as fill-in-the-blanks, but the basic game is answering multiple-choice trivia questions based upon, you guessed it, pop culture and the movies.



There's not a lot here that is substantially different from the other *You Don't Know Jack* games, but that's all right. There are, however, slight alterations from the original game. Each question's introduction is coupled to a movie-related piece of animation. In addition, the feigned commercials, which run at the conclusion of the game, contains a cinematic theme which good-naturedly blends in with the scope of the product.

So what does that mean? Well, *You Don't Know Jack* trades on humor, pop-culture and irreverence. Questions range from the bizarre ("Which of the following is an entertainment union and which is a fictional spy organization?") to the extremely bizarre ("What could Martha Stewart do with Steve Buscemi's remains at the end of the film *Fargo*?"). Both correct and incorrect answers elicit a smart response by the game's host, and closing commentary is often as funny as the questions and answers posed. (A personal favorite: "Perhaps the prison guard from *Dead Man Walking* likes to announce other events in his day. 'Prison guard pooping!'".)


Round 2
Children of the Lesser Corn
$4,000
Imagine a movie in which the kids from "Children of a Lesser God" go on a mad killing spree just like the kids from "Children of the Corn." Which of these would be the BEST tagline?
1. "They want your limbs!"
2. "They can't hear your scream!"
3. "They can't walk but you can't hide!"
4. "What they can't see CAN hurt you!"
Chunky
$16,500

Questions range from the bizarre to the extremely bizarre.

What sets *You Don't Know Jack Movies* apart from the standard trivia game is that players really need to know how to process information. While precise knowledge helps, it's equally important to make logical comparisons, know basic math, history and more. Therefore, movie acumen, along with an interest in general topics of conversation, proves ideal.

Throughout the game, the graphics are spartan but employed effectively. Text may occasionally morph, move or otherwise flit about the screen. I'd hazard a guess and say that even the most die-hard "eye candy" devotee won't be bothered by the clean interface. Frankly, there's little need for flashy graphics, and *Jack* makes perfect use of those it includes.

Sound is a much more important piece of the pie here, and *Jack Movies* has arguably the best voice-over work of any game to date. The host, as well as the crew members, are all convincingly portrayed. The host, in particular, is both smart-alecky, cynical, and ingratiatingly abrasive. Players are treated to grating remarks with every answer, whether they are wrong or right. Therein the beauty of the game; *You Don't Know Jack Movies* will make even the most uptight and ardent megalomanics laugh so hard that, in the end, they won't be bothered by a smart-mouthed piece of software. Have fun! CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Every aspect of this title is right on the money.*

MISSES: *While 800 questions seems like a lot, you'll be surprised at how quickly your addiction will get you to run through them all.*

LAST WORD: *Those who have never played a Jack game, start. Now.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	30
Playability	5
Originality	19
Graphics	18
Sound & Music	5
Physical Components	10

OVERALL 87

"GRAPHICS ARE GORGEOUS, FLIGHT MODELS IMMACULATE"

BOOT

"FLYING CORPS IS OUTSTANDING"

PC GAMER

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

"THE TOP WW1 FLIGHT SIM, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM, THIS IS A GREAT GAME"

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edutainment

REVIEW

Medium:	CD-ROM	Supports:	WIN 3.1, WIN 95
Developer:	ImageBuilder	Publisher:	Discovery Channel
Telephone:	301-986-0444	Website:	www.multimedia.discovery.com

Pirates: Captains Quest

By Jim McCullaugh

IN *PIRATES:* *Captain's Quest*, the basic premise is that the player becomes the captain of a pirate, merchant or privateer ship during the "Golden Age of Piracy". Ranging roughly from 1700 to 1725, this was a time when several European countries vied for maritime dominance, and the Caribbean was no place for the faint-of-heart.

After choosing their gender and nationality, the player is immediately transported to a spectacular vantage point somewhere amidships of a classic 110-foot wooden Barque. Thanks to some nifty 3D effects, the ocean appears to be undulating beneath the ship's aft, caressing the hull to evince a sense of speed and high seas daring. Players are tasked with a goal, such as sink or plunder 30 ships, obtain at least 33,000 pieces of silver, gather information for their chronicles, or complete an assigned quest.

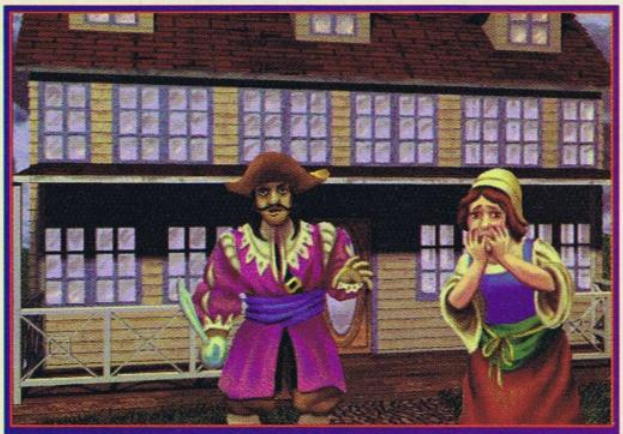
The interface is user friendly and graphically based. Sailing the ship is straightforward; a combination of mouse clicks and/or keyboard commands can call up any maneuver. Clicking on the <+> or <-> keys, for example, raises or lowers the sails. Moreover, clicking to the right or left of the forward mast changes the ship's heading. A compass, located at the bottom of the screen, depicts which direction the ship is heading while actually clicking the compass calls up a map of the Caribbean waters. A red flag, situated on the right side of the screen, indicates which direction the wind is blowing. Clicking the top of the screen takes the player up to the Crow's Nest. Here, the player is provided with a panoramic 360° bird's-eye view of the surrounding terrain as seen through the lens of a telescope. Of course, players can always descend from the deck to the bowels of the ship, checking supplies or visiting other parts of the ship if they so desire.

One of the first things players will do is visit a port, such as Tortuga, San Juan, St. Martin, Kingston or Cartagena. Dockside, the player chats with the locals, frequents the pubs and eateries, stocks up on sorely-needed supplies at the trading post, and is afforded clues about their overall goal. As with similar games, players must at all times stay cognizant of their supply situation. Otherwise, they may find themselves at sea short of food and ammunition.

In port, players will also bump into some nasty folk, such as pirates or other notorious scoundrels, who may challenge them to a sword fight. The player will, for example, encounter legendary pirates such as Blackbeard, Calico Jack, Stede Bonnet or Edward Low. Here the edutainment portion of the game devolves into an action-oriented slugfest requiring the player to defeat their opponent with nothing more than the blade of their cutlass.

Heading out into the open sea usually means encountering other sailing vessels. Fortunately, the ship's first mate will alert the player to any sightings. After observing the ship, the player must skillfully navigate his own ship to within range of the enemy vessel. The player then clicks on one of his cannons, which switches the viewpoint from the first-person perspective to a top-down vantage point depicting the two ships locked in battle. The player must again outmaneuver his opponent, bringing to bear a broadside volley against the opposing ship's aft or stern. Players can always opt to ram the other ship, board it, and engage in a sword fight to determine who will reap the plunder, and who will serve as shark food.

If all this sounds entertaining, it is. Simultaneously, the player picks up useful information along the way, learning a thing or two about one of the most interesting periods of world history. Ultimately, that's what spells the difference between an edutainment title and an ordinary adventure game. As the player discovers, information gleaned during the journey is pasted into the pages of their chronicles. In addition to history, players also learn how to manage a ship and its meager supplies, while undergoing a quick apprenticeship on the art of sailing, navigating and using a compass.



"There's just something alluring about all that pirate lore."

With *Pirates: Captain's Quest*, the overall play is reminiscent of the legendary *Oregon Trail* series. It manages, nonetheless, to deliver a learning experience which is unique and highly addictive. It is also far more animated than many history adventure games on the market these days. And, of course, there's just something so alluring about all that pirate lore. CGE

OVERVIEW

HITS: *Nice combination of history adventure with pure game play, such as sword fights or ship battles.*

MISSES: *Might appeal mostly to males, although there is a female caption option.*

LAST WORD: *There's something so alluring about pirate lore.*

Ratings

Dollar Value	27
Playability	6
Originality	17
Graphics	16
Sound & Music	8
Physical Components	8

OVERALL 82

A Call to Arms

The Role of Reconnaissance in iM1A2 Abrams

by Alan C. Fusco

Interactive Magic's *iM1A2 Abrams* (*iM1A2*) is a worthy, if completely unrelated successor to Microprose's *M1 Tank Platoon* (*M1*). *M1* was, for all intents and purposes, a training exercise demonstrating the effectiveness of American tanks, and their various supporting combat equipment, against the Soviet bloc's capable, but rarely superior, combat forces. Unfortunately, many of the lessons learned in *M1* will not readily transfer to *iM1A2* because the Interactive Magic effort is a vastly different product. First, the M1A2 tank modeled is much more advanced than the M1A1. Second, the numbers and composition of the supporting equipment varies; and third, the terrain and enemy capabilities are markedly different throughout.

PRECONDITIONS

In order to make life challenging but not overly frustrating, the following *iM1A2* settings were used: Invulnerability — Off, Unlimited Ammo — Off, Arcade Mode — Off, Automatic ID — On, Viewable from Support — On, Viewable from Enemy — Off, Perfect Intelligence — Off, Friendly Forces — Veteran, Enemy Forces — Veteran. Setting the Automatic ID to the On position is helpful as well, since players may have trouble identifying targets from a distance.

Enter the tactical map view (the <M> key) and press the "Checkpoints" buttons to review the computer-generated checkpoints.

Begin your campaign at the Captain setting so you can command all friendly troops, then choose Iran. Iran is a logical choice because, even at the highest AI levels, most beginners can readily defeat the opponent (albeit with some casualties incurred). Don't proceed to Bosnia or the Ukraine until you've gained some measure of comfort in Iran, since these regions are much more difficult. The enemy's equipment is more up-to-date, their tactics are better, and air power, especially in the Ukraine, can destroy your entire platoon at the outset.

LESSON 1: RECONNAISSANCE IS LIFE

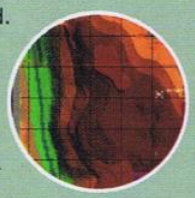
The first lesson concerns information, or the lack thereof. Failure to accurately identify and assess the enemy's positions and effective strength can prove fatal. The axiom "reconnaissance is life" will ultimately determine how you select your core support troops, while dictating the proper response for any given scenario.

As soon as the simulation starts, issue a company-wide "Halt" order.

To begin with, select the Desert Riposte scenario. First, you'll be presented with a list of core support units that will accompany you throughout the course of your campaign. While opting for another *M1A2* platoon may seem inviting, I prefer to pick reconnaissance units at this stage, since you'll have the opportunity to deploy additional firepower later on. My standard selections include a Scout Platoon, Scout Helicopter, and an off-map 155mm Artillery Battery. If you want to pick any other units, do so. Depending on the cam-

paign, I may select either a Light Anti-Tank unit (which I tend to use in the reconnaissance role), or an Air Defense vehicle such as the M1037 or M2A2. Air Defense units are especially crucial to surviving either Bosnia or the Ukraine.

If you are asked to select a route, choose any one you prefer. However, when the Mission Selection comes up, pick either Assault, or Recon and Security. Not only are Assault missions fun to play, players may find it easier to adapt since they are more flexible in nature. Note your mission objectives, then pick additional mission-specific support groups. For the purposes of this article, I picked a second *M1A2* platoon and a couple of FIST-V forward observer units to direct supporting artillery fire. A second helicopter and some *M2A2* Infantry Fighting Vehicles (IFV) would have been an equally good choice. While the IFVs are more susceptible to fire than a tank platoon, they are ideal units to destroy those pesky enemy infantry units dotting the battlefield. When deployed in a good defensive position, IFVs can inflict a surprising amount of damage to a tank platoon.



Once the mission begins, immediately issue a "Halt" order to the entire company. Press the <M> or <F9> key to bring up the tactical map. Remember, "Reconnaissance is Life"; it's suicide to have your troops advance into battle without determining what lays ahead.

On the map screen, click on the button labeled "Checkpoints" to highlight the computer-generated checkpoints for each vehicle. For most missions, the computer will generate a fairly direct route to the object (see Figure 2). You can be sure that this march route is fraught with peril, so commanders who adhere to them will realize that an alternate route needs to be defined. In Checkpoint Mode, click on each vehicle icon, then select the "Clear" button to erase the checkpoints assigned to each vehicle. Follow this procedure until you erase all the checkpoints. Now take some time to evaluate the entire situation. Where is your objective? What terrain surrounds it? Where would the enemy be likely to position their defenses, or what route would they likely approach from?

Deploy recon units before dispatching any other equipment. You must determine the enemy's position and strength in order to formulate a solid offensive or defensive plan.

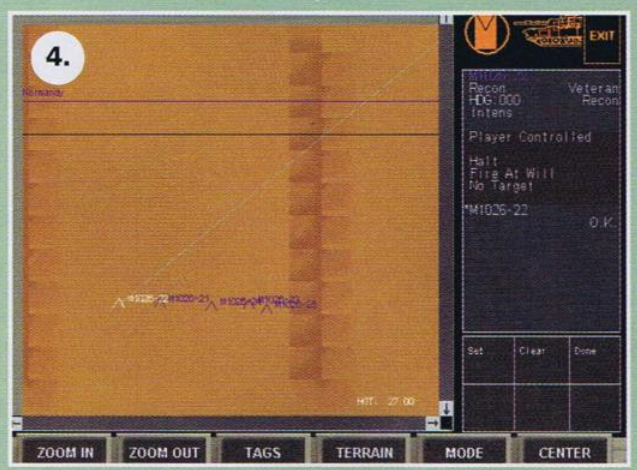
I like to conduct an initial reconnaissance run using the map borders as an artificial shield or buffer. If you approach along the edges of the map, you essentially don't have to worry about being ambushed from your blind side. In figure 3, I ordered the helicopter up the left side of the map, then sent my scout vehicle up towards the higher elevations along the right side of the map. New checkpoints are entered by selecting the Checkpoint option, clicking on the vehicle you want to assign checkpoints to, and then pressing the "Set" button. The left mouse button is used to plot the waypoints. Once you are satisfied with the route your recon units are going to take, issue an "Advance Fast" order by right clicking on the unit. Toggle on accelerated time <Ctrl> <+>, then wait for the first signs of contact.

You can — and should — split up your scout units. For instance, the M1026 Scout platoon can be divided into five vehicles. Zoom in on the map until each individual vehicle appears as an upside-down V. You can then select an individual vehicle by clicking on it with your mouse. Checkpoints or other orders can now be assigned. Figure 4 shows how to separate an M1026-22 from the group.

It's wise to zoom in on a recon unit, then split it into five separate vehicles, each with their own checkpoints. Individual vehicles can cover more ground and are less likely to be detected.

Once contact with the enemy has been established, issue "Halt" orders to the recon unit that detected the threat. Next, determine whether the enemy has spotted your recon unit; you'll know if the vehicle comes under fire. If he has, immediately issue a "Retreat" order. Remember, recon units are especially fragile assets and should not be written off as wasteful cannon fodder. If, on the other hand, the enemy hasn't spotted it, then pause and wait for support.

Figure 9 depicts a dangerous situation brewing. My OH-58 Kiowa Scout helicopter was destroyed by an enemy attack helicopter early in the game. I concluded that an enemy Mi-24 Hind attack helicopter was lurking somewhere in the northwest quadrant, so I split up my scout units, sending one vehicle towards the northwest quadrant to keep an eye on things. My other recon vehicles spotted T-80 tank platoon. I decided to slowly move one of my M1A2 platoons up



along the higher elevation on the right side of the map to engage the T-80's. The results of the engagement are shown in Figure 6. All known enemy units were destroyed, with no loss of life or equipment to my own side. If I had followed the original route of march, my forces would have been in big trouble.

LESSON 2: GETTING YOUR HANDS DIRTY

iM1A2 Abrams is an impressive product, which permits the player, if s/he so desires, to conduct operations entirely from the tactical map. If you're willing to spend the time to micro-manage activities, every objective can be attained without so much as getting your hands dirty. In my opinion, this isn't nearly as satisfying as assuming the platoon leader's role, taking charge from a first-person perspective.

In order to be successful, players need to understand a few basic facts of life. First and foremost, the tank crews handed off to the computer for control — specifically the gunners — can identify and engage targets faster than you can. If you want to grease the enemy yourself, you'll probably have to issue a "Cease Fire" order to your platoon. Secondly, it's all too easy to become disoriented by the first-person perspective. The TC, CITV, Gunner and Driver views can, in theory, be pointed in completely different directions. In the heat of battle, it's easy to start engaging enemy vehicles to the side or even the rear of your tank. This is an extremely dangerous situation since it exposes the thinner and weaker sides and rear of the tank to enemy fire. Therefore, make sure the hull is oriented to the gunners position (<Ctrl><F7>) when engaging enemy troops. Finally, once you begin to manage tanks on an individual basis, the computer won't take over from you unless you specifically tell it to do so. Make sure you issue a "Resume Orders" or "Fire at Will" order before leaving any vehicle to reconnoiter the area.

One of the more frustrating aspects of the game has to do with locating the enemy while inside the tank. From a distance, enemy units are depicted as little more than a pixel or two in height and can be easily dismissed even by a trained eye. I find that noting the approximate bearing of the enemy unit on the tactical map, then following up by scanning the horizon in the general direction of the sighting with the CITV set at 3x magnification, works. This is where the Automatic ID setting becomes especially useful. Figure 7 demonstrates the advantages of using the CITV. Pressing the "ID TGT" button identifies the target as a Soviet-made BMP-2 IFV. I can now hand off the target to the gunner by pressing the "TGT DES" button. In fact, you can easily give the computer-controlled gunner several simultaneous targets, which he will happily engage and destroy. Make sure the gunner has been issued "Fire at Will" orders or he will abstain from combat. Using the joystick for these actions is an ideal and accurate way to identify and designate targets from the CITV. If you want to manually engage the target, locate the target in the CITV, then press the <Shift><F6> keys. Better yet, then press the <F6> key alone to rotate the gunner's position to the same bearing as the CITV, then enter the gunner's position to finish 'em off.

One of the recon units have detected an enemy T-80 platoon. Time to move in for the kill.

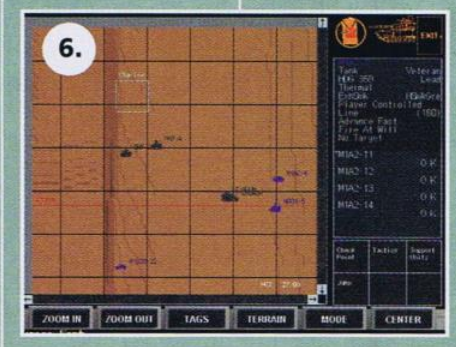


Figure 8 shows the gunner's perspective set to maximum magnification. The target can be "lased" (laser designated), then engaged. My tank came under enemy fire — while not seriously damaged, the laser sighting apparatus was rendered inoperable. How then does the player gauge range-to-target, or manually fire a round, without the benefit of a laser rangefinder and computer-controlled elevation and lead calculation? One method is to hop into another nearby tank, obtain an estimate by using its rangefinder, hop back into the first tank, then manually enter the range using the "MAN" (Manual) GPS Control mode. This really isn't necessary unless the enemy is at an extreme range. A simpler approach is to enter "BTL SIGHT" (Battle Sight) mode on the GPS Control system. In Battle Sight mode, the maximum range a shell can fall is

The results of a carefully planned assault. No friendly units were lost and all of the enemy's units were destroyed. Before heading off for Objective Charlie, it's time to move the recon units to determine the location of any other enemy units.

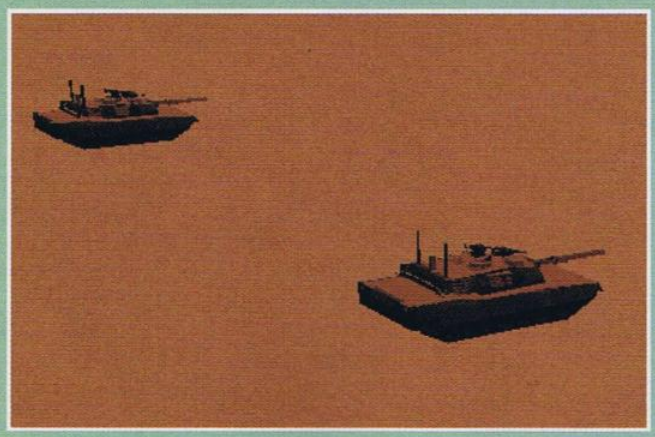
The CITV is useful for finding, identifying and targeting enemy units. The "ID TGT" function identifies the target as an oncoming BMP-2. The target can now be handed over to the gunner for destruction by pressing the "TGT DES" button.

the range in which a shell drops half the height of a tank (if aimed at its top). Thus, sabot rounds have an approximate range of 1,200 meters. Place the GPS into BTL SIGHT mode, select a sabot round, aim just over the top of the target, and fire. If you miss, this will usually mean that the target is beyond 1,200 meters. Raise the gun a notch (super elevation), and try again. In effect, this increases the range of the projectile. By using this technique, you won't have to worry about the loss of your laser rangefinder. In figure 8, both units were destroyed with this technique.

It isn't really necessary to lead a moving target in "STND GTS" mode. Just keep it within your sites, then lase it; the battle computer will calculate any lead necessary. If you miss, the target may be moving too fast. If this is the case, switch the laser to "Air" mode. This will direct the laser to fire three times at one-second intervals. You will have to keep the target centered in the rangefinder for three seconds, but the computer will then have much more useful information to work with, and consequently will be able to calculate a more appropriate lead. Using a sabot round under these conditions will prove significant, since it reaches the target much faster than other types of ordinance. You can also switch to BTL SIGHT mode and try to lead the target manually. Under these conditions, experience truly tells!

Anyone who has played a tank simulator should understand the importance of moving a tank into a "hull-down" protective position. This is nothing more, really, than putting your tanks so that only the turret is vulnerable to return fire. Unfortunately, I find it much more difficult to accomplish in *iM1A2* than it was in *M1*. Amazingly, this is due to the hi-res graphics employed in the product. *M1's* crude pallete was based on only 16 colors, while the polygonally-based terrain made it relatively easy to identify elevation shifts or gauge when a vehicle had successfully deployed into a hull-down position. If you turn off many of the graphic options in *iM1A2*, you can essentially obtain a more sharply-defined terrain, but I really don't consider this an acceptable alternative. To make matters worse, elevation changes on the tactical map are equally difficult to ascertain. I really wish there was a "Hull-Down" order that could have simplified the process.

A view of the same targets in Figure 7 from the gunner's position at 10x magnification. All that remains is to lase the target, then fire. Actually, this tank's laser sight is damaged, so the targets were destroyed using BTL SIGHT mode and sabot rounds.



To address this, I migrate to the tactical map, then center the image on the platoon I want to place in a hull-down position. I then zoom in to maximum magnification, moving the tanks in question up to the edges of any noticeable elevation changes. Next, I issue a "Halt Order" and jump into any of the rearmost tanks, assuming the gunner's position. Next, I issue an "Advance Slow" order, which will separate the tank from its platoon and permit it to be controlled autonomously. When the viewpoint in the GAS (Gunner's Auxiliary Sight) changes from terrain to sky, I immediately issue a "Halt Order." My tank should be deployed in a hull-down position if the view from the driver's position exhibits terrain while the GAS displays sky. Repeat this process for each tank, hopping into the lead tank last. Just remember to give all your units the "Reform Formation" order before moving out, or you may be in for a nasty surprise!

If you follow this doctrine, you will rarely be shocked by the enemy's actions while maintaining the upper hand in most engagements. If you find your forces unexpectedly engaged, immediately issue a "Smoke Generation" order, then fire a salvo of smoke grenades. In effect, this will buy your forces time to regroup while deciding on a proper course of action.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I haven't focused on many of the subtle aspects of the game. There's a wide array of orders that can be issued, which affects both company and platoon battle deployments. Although concentrating on assault in lieu of workable defensive measures, I believe what's been discussed here is time-honored. After all, reconnaissance is a vital and integral component of both offensive and defensive battle doctrine. CGE

"M.A.X."-imizing Success

A Hints & Tips Guide for M.A.X.

by Robert Mayer

Like so many other games, *M.A.X.* shoehorns the player into the boots of a planetary conqueror, bent on total domination of a world torn asunder. Unlike many other games, though, Interplay's offering also presents many and varied tactical and strategic challenges, some subtle, some rather straight-to-the-point. Whether played in turn-based or simultaneous mode, *M.A.X.* rewards thoughtful play far more than simple and rapid mouse clicking. Of course, mastery of such a game requires a bit of effort, some perseverance, and maybe a little help from a friend.

IN THE BEGINNING

The basic structural integrity in *M.A.X.* is quite familiar. In "start from scratch" games, players pick landing sites, explore for resources, build a colony, scout for opposition, and crush the enemy when located. Each of these pursuits requires a different approach, and places different demands on the player. Depending on the length of the game, some phases become more important than others. In a long game, for example, finding a good starting site and discovering rich deposits of resources will be crucial. In a short game, on the other hand, rapidly raising a military force, and locating, then defeating the enemy as quickly as possible takes precedence over balanced, leisurely development. Style of play is important, too. If a peaceful victory is desired, building ecospheres for victory points will demand a careful building strategy, while a war of conquest will render much of the development superfluous. In set piece actions, the goals are already determined, and games tend to gravitate towards tactical considerations rather than grand strategy. In the big free-for-all games, however, long-term and short-term planning are essential.

The very first aspect that the player faces — once length, turn mode, and difficulty levels have been set — is which clan to pick. Frankly, this is a matter of preference. Naturally, players should choose a clan that reflects their particular style of play. Keep in mind that clan benefits are, essentially, researched improvements which you are given for free. Upgrades are expensive, so players should pick a clan that provides them with certain upgrades *gratis*. It is easier and cheaper to upgrade units that already have improved stats, and it may be some time before a colony is truly capable of supporting significant research.

Once allegiances are determined, the player must choose a landing site. Many factors come into play, chief among them the length of the game, the number of players, and of course the geography of the contested planet. If there are only two players, it is much easier to find an isolated landing site than it is with four eager competitors vying for campsites. The player's goal should be to locate a site that will be defensible, offer room for expansion, and hopefully won't be too close to other likely landing sites.

Corners make for good defensive positions, but limit expansion to only two sides. Conversely, a central position offers excellent room for expansion, but is very vulnerable. If these are the only choices available, I recommend going for the corner. On a medium-sized island, a position further inland from the corner is even better. Islands or small continents offer several advantages; Other players are not likely to be encountered, the player's base is safe from heavy attacks — until the player's foes develop naval and air forces — and the player's own naval and air forces can eventually head off in any direction. Of course, if the island is too small or resource-poor, the player could be in for a long and trying game. Still, islands make very good starting positions.

Next, players must outfit their landing party. Not only is this fun, but it's essential to getting off to a good start. It also requires that players formulate a plan of action. Again, planning is crucial in *M.A.X.*: Players can't simply spend their starting credits willy-nilly and expect to be successful. The player's seed money is more than adequate to accelerate a good plan, but isn't deep enough to compensate for a bad plan or no plan at all.

Use connectors to spread your complex out, and defend each part

Although units and upgrades carried down to the surface will be immediately available, it may be some time before your industrial base can begin supplementing your starting forces. Upgrading unit types will mean a higher-quality force once production gets going. Players, though, may not witness the benefits of such improvements for quite some time, since factories take time to get up and running. Purchasing additional units ensures proper protection for the player's fledgling colony, and permits a much quicker start to exploration and conquest. By the same token, however, miscalculations or bad luck can strip these units away, leaving the player with nothing to show for his efforts.

Maintaining a large initial force might seem like an overkill tactic, especially if the player has started in a safe, well-pro-

tected location. By and large, if the player handles his forces aggressively, he should go for more units; if he (or she) plays defensively, he should go for the upgrades. In either case, players may want to purchase an extra constructor, an engineer, some scouts, and a tank or two for defensive purposes, as well as any upgrades they can then afford. If the player decides to buy several upgrades, keep the other clan's strengths in mind.

IN THE MIDDLE

Okay, so the player has landed safely on the planet — now what? Players start with a mine (conveniently placed on a serviceable resource site), some power generators, and a constructor unit plus an opening force. This is where the player's building strategy becomes critically important.

There are many ways players can proceed (and perhaps succeed with many of them), but players should, in theory, have some idea as to which way they are headed. There are so many options in *M.A.X.* that if players build on a willy-nilly basis, they will probably just be wasting resources and time. No matter what they decide to do, players will have to support two dissimilar yet related infrastructures: conquest and development. Conquest involves creating and supporting the military force needed to defeat the enemy, while development involves the

Deploying in a corner protects the flanks

construction of ecospheres, research labs, and all the other facilities necessary for a successful (read: victory point gaining) colony. In addition to the primary structures, players will also need to build

defensive installations to protect their investments. Of course, all of this requires resources, which players must locate, extract, and sometimes process.

Once players determine any perceived threats — securing the surrounding area if necessary — they will need to locate new resources, even during the opening phases of complex construction. Players can send their surveyors on an automatic search, which is a particularly good tactic if they are situated on islands free of local competition. Whether the game is set on

automatic or manual control, surveying becomes necessary for the discovery of the richest deposits of fuel, gold, and materials. Remember, players can even exploit resources in ocean hexes if a water platform is built in that hex. Water platforms are also excellent mechanisms for extending coastlines, thereby accommodating buildings that might not otherwise fit. While the player's first mine will provide enough resources to get the colony going, players will soon need to locate more; gold, in particular, will always be in short supply. Depending upon survey results, it may be best to build several mines, each one tasked to maximize output from one particular resource. One way to do this is to build a spider complex, where mines are situated on the periphery and factories are placed at the well-defended center of a complex; join all the parts with connectors, and defend as necessary.

Generally, letting surveyors roam about on automatic is fine, as

Use engineers to build platforms so you can exploit offshore resources—there's no EPA to complain

long as they don't meander too close to the bad guys. Periodically, players should click on the survey button to see what they've discovered, then build accordingly. Players should also have a plan in mind for each mining facility; it does little good for the player to build a mine over a gold supply only to discover that they lack the power to run it or the refinery to process it. Players should keep track of construction time and number of constructors and engineers involved at all times, trying to arrange things in a logical pattern so that new facilities can come online as soon as possible. When erecting things, players should also consider how much space the structure will occupy, leaving pathways for units to travel along. It isn't very reassuring to discover that your heavy vehicle plant may no longer have access to the outside world. Also, players should also remember to leave space for defensive works. Before they build, players should conceptualize how each new addition will affect their overall defensive plan. Ideally, there should be a complete array of sensors, antiaircraft, and antisurface units and fortifications scattered about the complex.

Careful management of construction projects bears additional fruit. Concentrate storage, manufacturing, and habitat-related activities such as research, ecospheres and training halls at the center of a complex, feeding raw materials from outlying mines as the need arises. This technique frees the player from having to build in undesirable areas where resources are located. Players should couple mines with radar, flak, artillery or gun turrets, and perhaps an infantry unit for anti-infiltration service. This tactic helps to protect mines, and, if properly implemented, will establish an effective defensive perimeter difficult to breach. Perimeter defense becomes a central if recurring strategy, only because players shouldn't invite their opponents to openly wander about their complex. Mobile fire brigades are also useful, especially if players are concerned

about marauders. A mobile flak unit, coupled with a few tanks, permits players to respond to virtually any threat. The most important thing, though, is to establish at least a modicum of air defense early on, as enemy AWACs will undoubtedly overfly undefended airspace.

Assuming players start the game with extra construction units, it's often a good idea to build some defenses right off the bat; a radar site, flak, and some sort of artillery battery make for a good start. While constructing these, players will probably want to use their constructor to build a vehicle plant. A heavy plant will permit players to build armored units, but, more importantly, it is needed to build more constructors. A light plant will turn out scouts and vital engineers, in addition to a few other useful units like mobile flak wagons. If a player begins with two constructors and some extra firepower, he or she can opt to create the light plant first, holding off on building the heavy plant.

After that, players should look into building another mining center. Follow that with a habitat, thereby getting a head start on ecosphere construction (that's the way to get victory points). Of course, along the way players will have to add power capacity to meet the increasing demand. Generally players can rely upon generators for a while, but eventually they will need a major power plant or two as soon as sufficient quantities of fuel to power these facilities is located. Once the power plants are online, destroy and salvage some of the generators, or leave them as spares.

A wealth of data makes each unit unique—choose wisely

Check the casualties section of the "Reports" screen to get an idea of how the opposition is faring. Note: This works no matter how little you know about the bad guys

An air factory will ultimately be required. Naval facilities are important, but usually less vital. Players will need to develop AWACs, transports, and fighters to protect them. No matter how good the player's ground defenses are, infiltrators can and will attempt to disable them, and swarms of enemy planes can easily knock them out. Fighters are the only reliable means of defending against an air attack. Players should strive to gain air superiority before undertaking serious ground offensives. Ground attack aircraft are powerful, but are quite vulnerable; they're wonderful counterattack units if the enemy has the temerity to assault the player's bastion.

A training hall is required to create infiltrators and infantry, while a barracks and a depot are necessary evils, since they can upgrade all of the player's ground units. Upgrades emanate from building and using research centers, which in turn depend, like ecospheres, on functioning habitats. Players shouldn't build things

Table 1: Attack and Defense Values for Ground Units

Unit	*Attack*	*Shots*	*Range*	*Ammo*	*Armor*	*Hits*	*Scan*	*Speed*	*Cost*	**Attack Value**	**Defense Value**
Missile Crawler	22	1	10	6	4	24	4	6	36	**0.61**	**0.67**
Infiltrator	6	1	4	12	2	8	4	5	27	**0.22**	**0.30**
Assault Gun	18	2	6	14	4	24	5	12	24	**0.75**	**1.00**
Rocket Launcher	15	2	7	16	4	24	4	6	24	**0.63**	**1.00**
Tank	16	2	4	14	10	24	4	6	12	**1.33**	**2.00**
Scout	12	1	3	10	4	16	9	12	9	**1.33**	**1.78**
Infantry	16	1	4	12	2	8	4	5	6	**2.67**	**1.33**

Value = Attack/Cost Defense Value = Hits/Cost

Radar, artillery, and flak make up a defensive cluster to protect this mine/power station section of the complex

they have no plans to use, particularly in a short game. Players should build only what they need, and not worry about defending noncritical parts of their colony.

In the field, there are many different paths to victory. *M.A.X.* employs the age-old rock-paper-scissors concept to resolve combat: For every weapon, there is a counterweapon. Players should always pay very close attention to the relative ranges of friendly and enemy units. Air units are the clearest example of how *M.A.X.* demands careful attention to detail. AWAC units "see" the farthest, and their scan range is wider than the combat range of flak units. Ground attack units, however, are relatively short-range weapons, and must penetrate within the effective range of antiaircraft units to attack.

So how does a player mount air strikes? Short of overwhelming the enemy with planes — a very expensive and wasteful procedure — the best way is to use infiltrators. Players should air-drop them by transport aircraft or deploy them with APCs, letting them disable the enemy's defenses long enough to warrant an follow-up air strike. How does a player guard against this tactic? Simple — use infantry to spot infiltrators. Combat in *M.A.X.* eventually necessitates attacks on or defenses of complexes, so players need to become intimately familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of defensive installations as well as mobile units. Bear in mind that units have a limited number of shots per turn. Once these are exhausted, the unit can no longer continue to fire. Numbers, therefore, are important; many times a swarm of cheap scouts can overwhelm a radar/flak installation even if it is defended by a powerful gun turret. Players will no doubt salute those scouts lost in the melee, but if that's what it takes to punch a hole in the enemy's air defense network....

Winning battles usually means shooting first; range and scanning ability are crucial. Players should employ their radar sites and planes to identify the enemy, firing at these long-range targets before they slip into range. Players will need to amass fleets of armored vehicles to wage a conventional war. Battles of attrition will ensue, so repair and resupply vehicles are a necessity for protracted mobile battles raging far from home. Combined arms tactics work especially well in *M.A.X.*; long and short range weapons ably complement one another.

Alien units are ugly, but make great (and free!) additions to your force

Above all else, players should remember to defend their complex! Loss of a key mine or factory can spell the end of the most ambitious plans. Conversely, players should do everything possible to destroy enemy facilities. It is well worth the sacrifice of several armored units to knock out a mine, but always keep a look out for strong defenses equipped with long-range weaponry. It does no good to lead an attack with units that will never have the opportunity to shoot. And always use infiltrators; these are the most versatile — and potentially deadly — units. One successful infiltrator can unravel an entire defensive line, yanking out the linchpin of even the heartiest position.

IN THE END

M.A.X. is a rich, deep game with far too many complexities to cover in one discussion. Players should make a plan, try to execute it, and remain flexible. If something doesn't work, try a different approach. The point of a strategy game is to provide a thoughtful means of exercising tactical and strategic prowess; *M.A.X.* rewards good battle planning, and punishes poor generalship. What more could any commander ask for?

Unit Status Screen
Mk 1 Alien Gunboat 3
Heavily armored and armed warship of alien design. Like the human gunboat, the alien gunboat excels at destroying other ships and land targets near the shore. All alien units repair themselves, and improve their abilities with experience.
28 Attack
2 Shots
8 Range
10 Ammo
18 Armor
40 Hits
4 Scan
7 Speed
1 Cost
Done

Airlift an infiltrator, and steal an alien gunboat out from under the noses of your foes....

Reaching for the Crown

A Hints & Tips Guide for Emperor of the Fading Suns

by Andrew Greenberg

Okay, the last guy who tried to become Emperor got his head fried. Now it's your turn. Trouble is, four other powerful nobles have the same idea. The Patriarch of the Universal Church wants to put his own puppet on the throne. The Merchant League wants to do away with all the nobles and declare the Third Republic — with themselves in command, of course. The Symbiots seem to want to do away with all humanity, and who knows just what the Vau want. Add to this mix some renegade warlocks, a plethora of rebels and the powerful Imperial forces, and you have a recipe for true pandemonium.

In *Emperor of the Fading Suns*, it's easy for players to get a bit overwhelmed by everything going. Your enemies start the game with a decent military force on not just one, but two planets. They control a fair number of cities. They can begin exploring, expanding and fighting on their first turn. With so much to do, how is a would-be Emperor supposed to know what to do next?

IN THE BEGINNING...

Start with the big game plan and go from there. Players can take any of a number of different paths to victory. They can sally forth to whup on everybody immediately. They can use diplomacy to obtain the allies necessary to put them in positions of influence, and then kick butt. They can opt for a slower buildup, developing new technologies and industries and building massive military units. Even within these grandiose strategies are less pretentious ones that can be used or rejected.

Do you trade with the League? Do you buy, sell, or both? Do you make most of your money via taxes, trade, or ripping off the Church? Do you concentrate on researching a variety of military units, or do you go straight for the plague bomb? Do you keep the Church happy by avoiding proscribed technology, or do you end up fighting the Inquisition? Do you drive the other houses off of neighboring worlds, or do you try to peacefully coexist? These are just some of the many questions players will no doubt ask.

The game itself usually pierces through three distinct stages, which this article will refer to as: Homeworld, Expansion and Empire. The first stage involves pacifying the player's starting planet and cleansing it of rebel influence. The second stage observes the player as he sends his forces to neighboring planets to conquer any unaligned cities. The final stage brings the player into direct conflict with the other nobles, and ends — we hope — with the player becoming Emperor of the Fading Suns.

HOMEWORLD

Each of the five houses starts the game with a unique homeworld ... well, at least *part* of a unique homeworld. It doesn't matter whether the rebels are disenchanted members of your own house, ruled by a minor house, or just plain obnoxious. They need to be incorporated into your growing empire. If you don't do it quickly, they will only become stronger. You should try to completely subjugate your homeworld within a dozen turns. If you're really good, you can do it in less than five (A.D. 4961).

Some players like to bombard cities, just to see what they are and what the rebels have contained within — a wasteful strategy, as cruisers do a better job of space-based bombardment and reconnaissance. Load up your assault landers with tanks, tank killers and self-propelled artillery, using them to attack the nearest city. Land in the most rugged terrain next to the targeted city (this ensures that any rebel counterattack will need its entire movement just to climb that hill). Now that you know what the city contains, bomb the heck out of it. Once it's been reduced to a militia (or as close as you can get to it), commence the ground assault. As soon as you take the city, start building artillery and anti-tank guns for use on the next site. If that city is situated near other cities, use your bulk hauler to ferry in reinforcements, sending them overland to kill more rebel swine. Repeat this process for as long as it takes to pacify your planet.

The fleet sets sail for parts unknown.

Another potential target is the Merchant League agora. Although they possess a vast wealth of resources, their defenses aren't especially well-developed. Capturing the agora may give you an immediate boost, but it can cripple you in the long run. Even if you make peace with the Merchant League later in the game, it will no longer have a place to sell you more goods. Trying to buy them on other planets is, at best, a haphazard undertaking.

Of course, there is more to do than just attack settlements. Send your space frigates off to explore nearby planets. Use your engineer to build a new city. I recommend finding a likely place to mine, farm or create energy, and you might want to consider erecting a second lab. Once committed, immediately begin building another engineer. Remember that roads cost nothing to build, so have your engineers lay them wherever they go.

Research can follow any number of different strategems, and should always follow a route that will prove most beneficial to the player's overall strategy. If you want more spaceships, start researching the physics tree immediately. If you want cool and cheap units, you may wish to start with psycho-social engineering so that you can get tracker legions, dervishes and more. If you really want to mess up your opponents, start off with microbiology and develop plague bombs.

This represents the stage of the game where money becomes a critical issue. You can buy anything you want from the Merchant League, but that cash crunch really becomes a problem. Borrowing money from the League is an option, as is skimming the Church tithe. Both tacks present risk. Fail to pay back the League, and you won't receive resources from 'em when you really need them late in the game. Skim the tithe to pay for research on forbidden technologies, and you can expect to have the Inquisition knocking on your door in no time flat.

The best way to make money, then, is to sell your own resources, but this too skirts danger. Sell off too much metal, and you might have a problem building new units. Sell off too much food, and your guys might start starving. Sell off too much of anything, and the League drops its prices to next to nothing. Oh, well. Like I mentioned, cash should pose a problem only at the outset. Once you've expanded, money should cease being an issue.

A noble takes refuge in orbit.

EXPANSION

Start by developing your homeworld. Exploit every resource you can find, and dot the planet with farms, mines and wells. Build an extra lab or two, then start on those electronics plants and chemical factories. Remember that cities also provide you with tax revenue, so build them whenever possible.

By now, you should also be moving onto other planets, but continue to concentrate your forces. Go after one planet at a time until your fleet is bulging with spaceships. Land an expeditionary force on a nearby planet, then seize an outlying city. Concentrations of cities tend to involve more troops, and even the dreaded surface-to-space missile launcher or laser cannon. You need to approach these cities on foot. Be careful to keep officers and nobles protected and surrounded by infantry. The other ground units act as a human shield, safeguarding the higher-ranking and more valuable types.

You might also want to drop an engineer or two on the planet to build factories and forts. While some players like to ferry in a constant stream of reinforcements from their home planet, it can be far easier to build those troops on the targeted world, especially if you are playing with Universal Warehouse on. This frees up troops, allowing them to drive on more than one world at a time. Hospitals are also useful for quickly getting injured legions back into action.

At this point you should be building some advanced units, but be careful how you employ these. Remember that green units are bereft of optimum attack and defense values. Initially, dispatch these units to conduct comparatively light combat actions to help bolster their experience ratings. Next, place them in stacks with similar, but less expensive, units that can absorb some of the damage that might otherwise be directed at them.

You're now ready to go to war with one of the other houses. If all has gone well, you should be able to begin your assault sometime before turn 30 (A.D. 4986). Your goal is to kill the nobles and seize the scepters. If you attack computer opponents, you can rest assured that the nobles will be residing in their palaces. Due to the widespread employment of PTS guns in these areas, you should seize a base of operations in the vicinity, instead of consummating an immediate assault on the nobility. This tactic also allows for the creation of a steady stream of reinforcements, soon needed to replace battlefield losses.

One of your earliest attacks should involve taking out your enemy's space cruiser; those space-based planetary bombardments can cripple an attack force. When you attack his ships, throw everything except cargo vessels into the assault. Freighters and bulk haulers have some attack value and, more importantly, can soak up damage that might otherwise strike your cruiser. Take heed: dump cargo before launching an attack. Transported units have no combat value, and are destroyed if their host ship blows up.

After you've taken the palace and gotten the votes, go ahead and mop up. Homeworlds are already well-developed and can provide a number of useful cities. Just be sure to defend conquered cities, and stay alert for surprise counterattacks. You might also try to get the scepters off-planet to prevent them from being retaken.

EMPIRE

Generally, you need to seize at least one of the other house's scepters before ascending to Emperor. Taking two out means victory will more than likely occur. Start building reinforcements on Byzantium Secundus. Concentrate on high-level infantry units and the like. Dervishes and shock troops also tend to help out a lot here.

Ferry in reinforcements from other planets, then take the offensive. If you really want to annoy the other players, place your noble in orbit on the turn in which you declare yourself Emperor. Then drop plague bombs on the other players' forts. Drop your noble (now emperor) down on some uninfected part of the planet. If you get hit with the plague, disband the infected units at once, before they can infect someone else.

Even if you don't use the plague, go ahead and hit your opponents as quickly as possible. Take out the nearest forts, creating a buffer zone to keep enemy units away from the emperor. Keep a close eye out for any enemy ships entering the system. Permitted to penetrate your defenses, these ships will start pounding on your stacks from orbit. While they cannot kill your noble (he stays hidden in his bunker), they can annihilate some of your better units.

These three stages then, delineate most games of *EFS* — though you may not always have the luxury of deciding when

the empire stage begins, especially in a multiplayer game. A number of strategies apply throughout the game, however. What follows are just a few of the more important ones.

EXPLORATION

Start moving your frigates between solar systems as soon as the game begins. Look for planets with an ample number of cities and good terrain. Various subfactors will determine which planets you may have to conquer first. These include: proximity to your homeworld, resource recovery capability, and whether the base provides a good jump-off point for you to attack other players. You will want to maintain some distance between your resource sites and the front lines, keeping certain planets out of harm's reach.

On the ground, explore as much as possible. While you know where existing cities

The Imperial Fleet engages nearby marauders.

are located, you'll need to discover sites for the creation of new cities. Locating ruins is especially important. While they tend to be shielded by powerful defenses, their underlying reward provides incentive enough for assault. In addition, new spaceships and nobles should never be overlooked.

Planes and tracker legions make the best exploration units. Remember to land planes in a city on every other turn, or they will eventually crash. Cargo pods also serve as excellent exploration units. Split a food pod into several smaller, and less valuable, one-point pods. Now send these out to explore the planet. Although some will get captured by rebels and other players, they're no great loss. You can also use cargo pods to capture enemy units that have retreated from combat.

PRODUCTION

Many players consider production the key to victory, and a well-planned setup can help your efforts immeasurably. Farms, mines and wells are the foundations from which everything else comes. Demands placed on food and metal production are obvious, but never neglect trace elements and energy. These become more and more important as the game progresses.

Once you have a few of these setups operating, ramp up electronics and chemical production. You will need plenty of

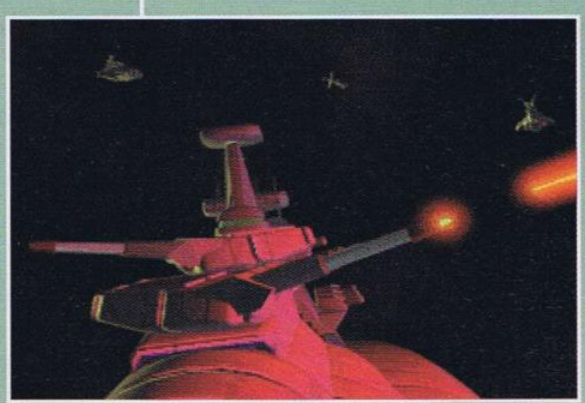
Someone's hot under the collar.

electronics, and several tons of chemicals, to fuel the war effort. Get these plants up and running as soon as possible, then consider staking a claim to ceramsteel, biochemicals, fusoriums and the like.

While you need a number of labs operating, you don't want to build too many. Per turn, each lab costs 500 firebirds apiece to maintain, and they make tempting targets for Inquisitors and enemy players. Five labs by turn 25 (A.D. 4981) is a good number, though players gravitating towards high-end technologies early on need to build more.

IMPERIAL OFFICES

For all intents and purposes, no one Imperial office is better suited for combat than any others. The Stigmata garrison possesses a strong planetary force, a relatively meager off-world fleet, and a wide array of resources. The Imperial Fleet is composed of a very powerful space armada, a small planetary contingent, and some valuable resources. The Imperial Eye provides none of these, but it does furnish a position on every homeworld.



If you are involved in combat anywhere near Stigmata, be sure to seize the outpost as quickly as possible. These troops can pummel anyone, but they take some time to transport. If you are involved in combat, but not near Stigmata, take the fleet. Its bombardment capabilities can destroy entire cities in a turn. If you are not at war, but preparing to be, then take the Eye. You get maps of every homeworld, troops on each of them, and a fort from which to build more.

Whichever office you get, remember to sell off the resources it creates. If you don't, they go to whoever claims the office next.

MULTIPLAYER MODE

There's nothing like trading blows with human opponents. Not only are they more challenging, but they prove infinitely more satisfying to beat. First of all, although the historical map permits balanced play, random maps create some interesting matchups.

As soon as you've secured your homeworld, start making changes. Move your nobles and scepters to safe locations. Surround your palace with other cities, but distribute your production to outlying regions to offset concentrations. The computer players (if there are any) still make easier targets, but watch your back. The best time to pursue other players is when they are committed to another war.

If your opponents are smart, they will also spread out their nobles. Therefore, attacking their palaces may prove pointless. Instead, target their labs. Not only will you disrupt their current research, but you might eliminate enough of them so that they can no longer maintain any technologies already discovered.

By the same token, be careful about trading off whatever technologies you develop. Demand a high price for them. Ask for votes, appointments or serious money. If for some reason you *do* trade someone a map of your homeworld, make immediate modifications to your planet. Raze old cities and build new ones.

You will undoubtedly need to make alliances to become Regent, though becoming Emperor will immediately end these alliances (that is, if your opponents have an ounce of sense). At that point get ready for a battle royal, since all intergalactic hell will break loose.

FIREPOWER: Mastering the Merge

by Tom 'KC' Basham

"Pointing your nose directly at the bad guy is one of the worst, if not the worst, merge techniques."

The first few seconds of an aerial battle — the brief moment before the opponents actually reach each other — may well be the most important interval of the entire fight. During these critical seconds, each participant attempts to refine his or her position and enter the fight with an advantage. By the time the two aircraft merge, or actually begin the fight, one pilot often will have attained a substantial advantage over his adversary. Identifying the appropriate entry into the fight and obtaining an advantage is a difficult task, especially in a multiple-aircraft environment. This month we'll examine the wrong way to set up a merge, how to defend against kamikaze "head on" merges and how to initiate an effective merge.

FIGURE 1

Hazards of turning to avoid a head-on pass.

YOUR NOSE IS OUT OF JOINT

First and foremost, pointing the nose of your plane directly at the bad guy is one of the worst, if not *the* worst, merge techniques. Anytime an aircraft points directly at another plane with a positive closure rate (a head-on approach) the pilot risks incurring a mid-air collision.

In the *Warbirds* online arenas, collisions become a particularly frustrating experience for the end user. Latency, or network delays, cause each computer to display the opponent about one second back in time; i.e, you see the bandit where he was about one second ago, not where he is right now. Consequently, one computer may see the two aircraft occupying the same point in space, while another sees them separated by several feet. The first computer registers a collision while the second doesn't. The result: the first player's aircraft is destroyed in a collision while the adversary flies on.

Worse still, a head-on approach inevitably places your aircraft directly in the path of the enemy's guns. Sure, this tactic points your guns back at his aircraft, but that still doesn't eliminate the threat posed by his weapons. Inexplicably, many sim jocks — after having spent hours learning to avoid the enemy's gunfire during a turning knife fight — will relentlessly hurl their aircraft directly into the enemy and subsequently die.

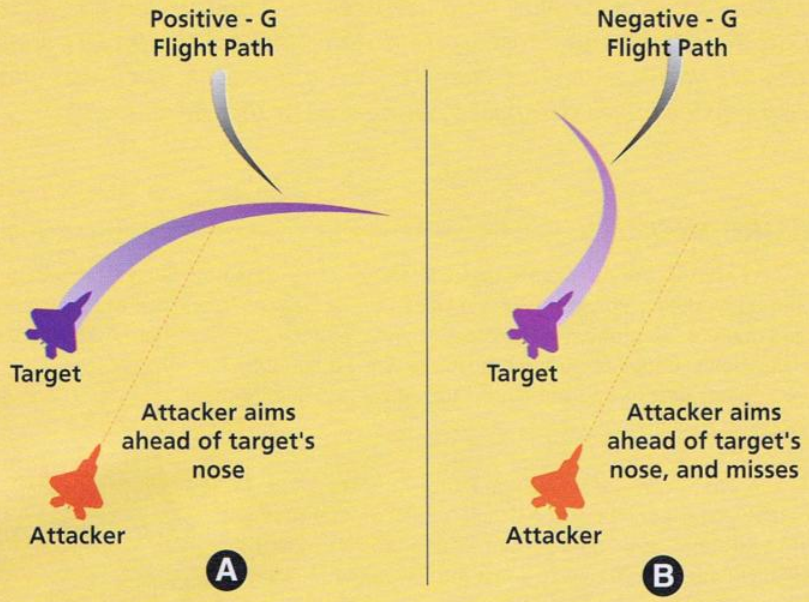
Flight simulations that fail to model midair collisions reinforce these bad habits. Some, like Kesmai's *Air Warrior*, have sought to discourage pilots from engaging in head-on passes by reducing gun effectiveness when shooting at a target's forward quarter. While novel, this approach has, in my opinion, had limited effectiveness combating head-on merges.

Generally speaking, computer-controlled opponents possess enough artificial intelligence to avoid such poor merge techniques. Why otherwise intelligent pilots will throw themselves with cavalier abandon into the enemy's gunsight defies reason. The question, though, is what do you do when you're facing a human opponent determined to charge directly at you?

Unfortunately, you can't always veer away from the bandit since turning away surrenders angles to the opponent, as shown in figure 1. If your fighter has a substantial speed advantage over the enemy, you may be able to outrun him, and thereby avoid any needless worrying about positional disadvantages. Otherwise, you're stuck between the proverbial rock and a hard place; turning away hands the enemy an angular advantage, while proceeding on a head-on course risks collision and enemy gunfire in the face. Fortunately, there are two moderately successful defenses you can employ.

First, try barrel rolling around the enemy during the approach. Make large loops around the enemy's flight path, forcing him to pull his nose around to maintain a gun track. Amass enough g-load to maintain a fairly high crossing rate, thereby forcing the bandit to calculate an appropriate lead for a deflection shot. Keep speed as high as possible. The higher the closure rate, the less time the bandit has to take a shot. If the barrel roll is perfectly executed, this technique works fairly well, especially against high-speed, poor-turning adversaries which can't yank their nose very quickly.

Secondly, negative g makes a good guns jink. That is, negative g during defensive jinking really screws up the bandit's firing solution. As shown in Figure 2, in a typical, positive-g turn the attacker aims ahead of the target's nose. If, however, the target pushes negative g while maintaining the same bank angle, the attacker's lead calculations are totally disrupted. Further, the bandit generally has to push more negative g in order to match the target's negative g-load, possibly caus-



Effects of positive and negative g on the bandit's lead calculations.

ing the bandit to red out.

The same course of action holds true during a head-on merge. Once the bandit points his nose directly at your approaching fighter, push -1 to -2 g's without otherwise turning your aircraft. The bandit's bullets usually slide harmlessly past the canopy as the friendly fighter slides away. Once the two aircraft pass, the friendly fighter can attempt to extend and re-enter the fight on his terms.

Of course, air combat is an unpredictable science. Rules of thumb and guidelines can, and oftentimes do fail. Sometimes, either by chance or by design, sim jocks find themselves in the worst possible scenario. You may find yourself slow, out of energy, while enemy aircraft is bearing down directly at 12 o'clock. Without the necessary energy to initiate defensive moves, the best choice — and often the only option — may be to point your aircraft's nose at the enemy, open fire with every onboard weapon, then immediately execute a break turn away from the enemy. With luck, the enemy will incur damage and, in the process, hopefully miss hitting your aircraft.

So, given a wide array of choices, how should you plan to enter an air battle? Obviously, the answer varies greatly, depending upon the circumstances you're confronted with. Which pilot has the better turning aircraft? Which pilot has all-aspect weapons? Which aircraft possesses more energy? Of course, whenever possible, enter the fight *behind* your adversary. If you do have to enter a turning fight, offset your flight path from the bandit's by a distance equal to your aircraft's turning diameter. As shown in Figure 3a, this provides enough room to turn 180 degrees and achieve a position directly behind the bandit. Cutting the separation in half, as shown in Figure 3b, provides room for only 90 degrees of turn. By reducing the lateral separation, you cannot complete your turn, and you surrender 90 degrees to your opponent. The required amount of separation varies with the rate of turn. At a given speed, a 9g bat turn will have a smaller turn radius than a lazy 2g turn.

Consequently, if you're looking to avoid a turning battle, minimize the flight path separation during a head-on pass, thereby denying turning room to your opponent. Of course, too little separation creates the dreaded head-on scenario discussed earlier. The pilot must carefully gauge the bandit's abilities and reduce separation enough to disrupt the first turn, while simultaneously maintaining enough distance to prevent a head-on scenario.

Keep in mind that flight path separation is not limited to the purely horizontal distance between the two aircraft. The separation can be purely vertical or a combination of horizontal and vertical components; however, a fighter must consider the effects of the earth's gravity on vertical turn performance when gauging vertical separation. Gravity will accelerate a descending fighter, thus increasing its turn radius. The fighter at a higher altitude must account for this when estimating the required vertical separation.

In summary, you should always endeavor to stay out of the enemy's gunsight, regardless of whether the bandit is ahead of or behind his aircraft. Putting yourself in front of the enemy's guns, even if you can shoot back, is *never* a good idea. Although the scenario inevitably happens during any air battle, don't facilitate your own simulated death by lunging directly into the jaws of the lion.

FIGURE 2

FIGURE 3

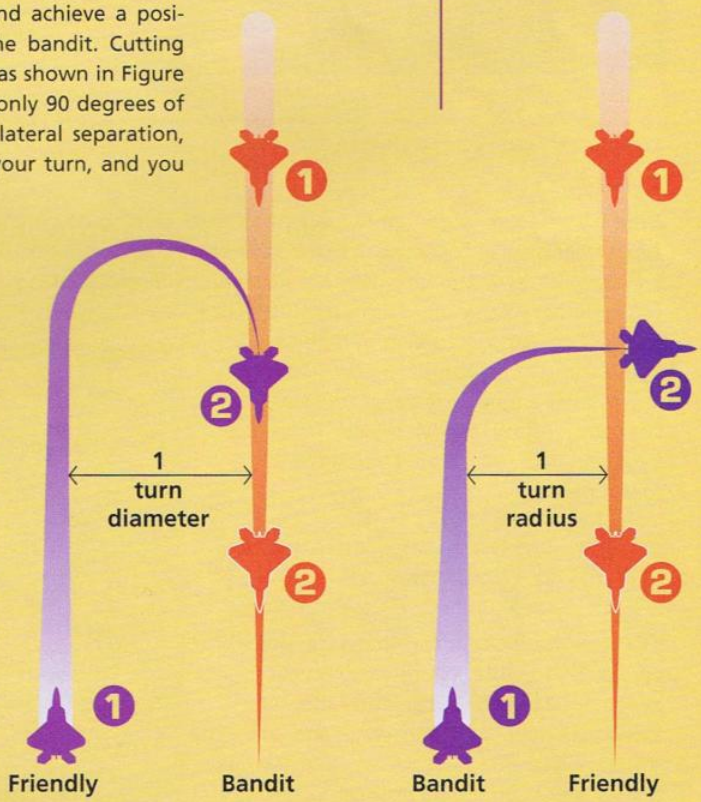
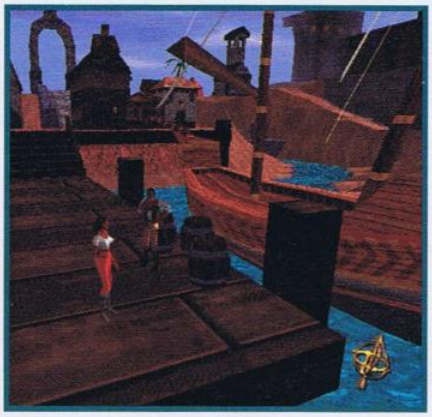


Figure 3
Effects of flight path separation on initial turn.

NEXT ISSUE

GAME OVER? *Not by a long shot! Though we strive to provide the finest and most up-to-date coverage, the fact is some games still manage to elude us. Here's a quick look, then, at what you can expect to see discussed, in depth, in our next issue:*



FEATURE STORIES

Panzer General 2 — The rumors are true; SSI has for some time now been hammering out a sequel to their wildly popular wargame *Panzer General*. Gone are the stoic 2D overhead maps in favor of a much more authentic, and dare we say breathtaking, isometric viewpoint. In our feature-length piece, we explain why *Panzer General 2* seems destined to remain on top of the wargaming heap for some time to come.

Zork Grand Inquisitor — Join Senior Editor Timothy Liebe as he does battle with the forces of the Grand Inquisitor, zips back and forth through time, and endures the sarcastic taunts of the disembodied Dungeon Master in this first look at Activision's latest comic adventure.

ABC's Wide World of Sports — Newcomer ABC Interactive has cobbled together a host of sports sims that looks to give new meaning to their oft-quoted phrase, "the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat!" Resident sports expert Bill Holmes gets to suit up and check out their upcoming titles, which include *ABC Sports Monday Night Football '98, ABC Sports Indy Racing* and *ABC Sports College Football: Heroes of the Gridiron.*

Company Profile: Bethesda Softworks — The company best known for their smash hit *Elder Scrolls* CRPGs and bloodcurdling *Terminator* series is hard at work, preparing to deliver more spine-tingling, death-defying titles in the months ahead. In our exclusive sneak peek, we step back and unveil their '98 lineup which includes (among other things) *Battlespire, X-Car, The 10th Planet* and *Red Guard.*

PREVIEWS & REVIEWS

Read up on some of the more fascinating titles coming down and heading off the gaming turnpike. Our September issue includes sneak peaks at *Semper Fi, Total Annihilation, Deathtrap Dungeon, Heavy Gear, Flying Nightmares 2, Uprising, War Breeds* and lots more. Thinking about spending your hard-earned money on a game you know precious little about? Perhaps we can be of service yet again. In the same issue, we'll be reviewing *The Ardennes Offensive, Sentient, History of the World, Norse by Norsewest, 3D Ultra Minigolf* and tons more.

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MAN OF WAR

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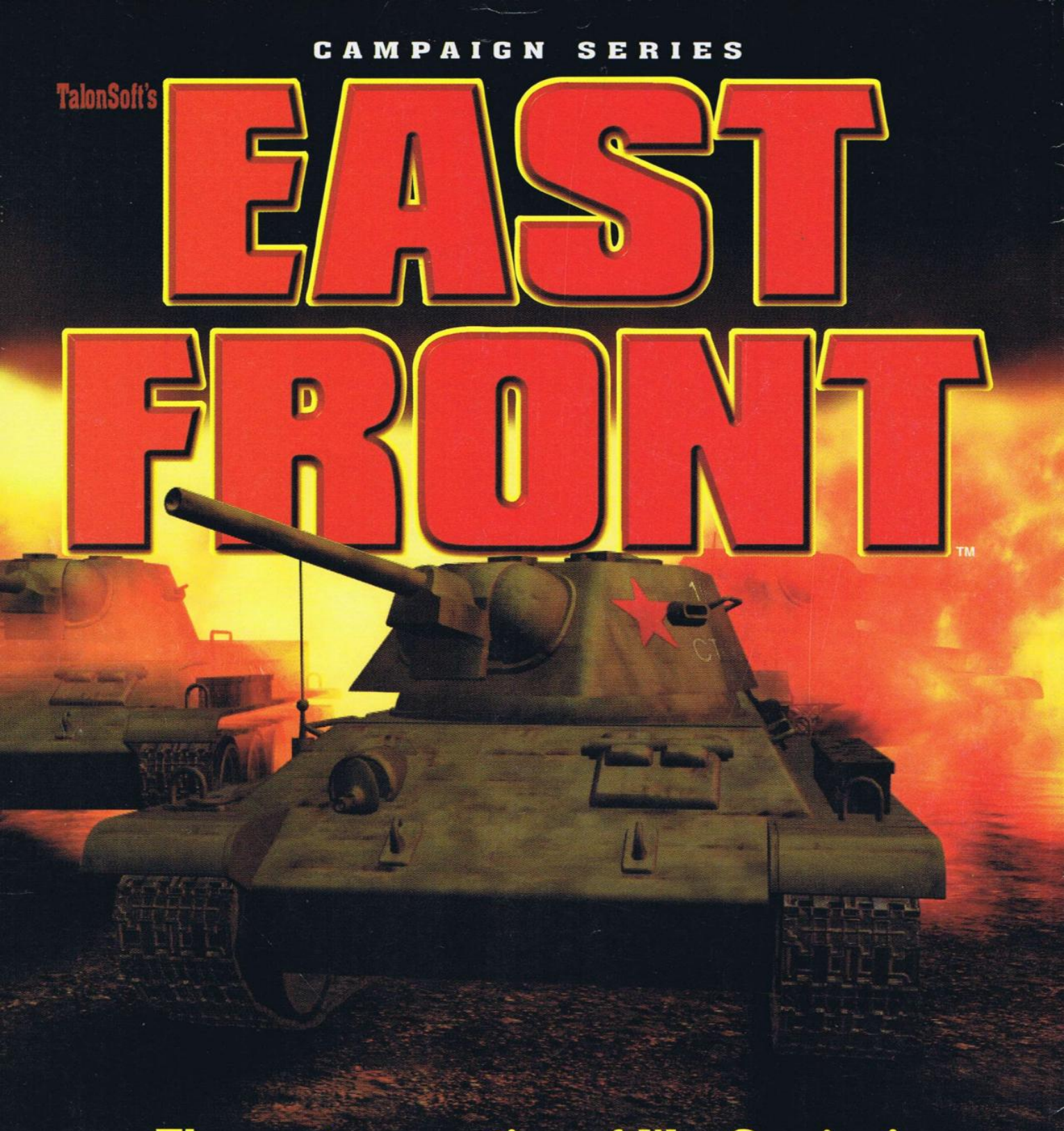

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